

Postmodernism and how Ajidarma used it against the New Order

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Abstract

Seno Gumira Ajidarma is a writer of central importance to contemporary Indonesian fiction. His writings span many genres and numerous styles. He has been a trenchant critic of the former New Order government and continues to play a role in writing socially engaged literature. His many publications of short stories, novels and non-fiction texts have been widely read and well received by many critics and academics inside and outside of Indonesia. His works contain elements of realism and surrealism. However, his works have also engaged with many postmodern issues. The aspects of his works studied in this thesis are: micronarratives, characterisation, self-reflexivity and the engagement with popular culture. These features are all part of the problems posed by postmodernism. This thesis aims to understand Seno in terms of postmodern literary practices: how has he used them in his texts and how they vary in the different examples. The thesis argues, also, that these postmodernist devices have been used to counter numerous aspects of New Order ideologies. Through the examples studies, this thesis seeks to show the developments Seno has made in broadening the aesthetic scope in contemporary Indonesian fiction as well as challenging the entrenched conventions on what makes up public discourse. Knowledge gained of the postmodern presence in Seno's fiction is related to recent developments in Indonesian fiction, and a new understanding will be given regarding how postmodernism has developed within the Indonesian context. The conclusions will be able to be used as a source of comparison for traces of postmodernism in the works of other writers. The conclusions can be used as part of the effort to establishing the existence of a postmodern literary canon in Indonesia.

Author's Statement

"This is to certify that the thesis comprises only my original work except where indicated in the preface; due acknowledgment has been made in the text to all other material used; the thesis is 30,734 words in length, inclusive of footnotes, but exclusive of tables, maps, appendices and bibliography."

Signature:

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Date:.....

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Introduction

An Encounter with Seno

Shopping at *Gramedia* in Yogyakarta in January 1998 I came across *Jazz, Parfum dan Insiden* (abbreviated as *Jazz*). It was by a writer I hadn't heard of: Seno Gumira Ajidarma. Curious to read an Indonesian writer's perspective on jazz, I bought it only to read it some months after I had returned to Australia. I wasn't initially drawn to the subject of the *Insiden* (the Dili massacre in 1991) or to its subversive politics. Also coming from the jazz periphery, I wanted to find out how his peripheral interpretations on the significance of jazz would differ from how I understood it. In the 'novel' Seno used impressionistic musings on jazz and perfume as starting points for connecting seemingly independent subject matter. 'What type of music would Chick Corea compose if he saw this scene?'¹ is one example where the narrator connects two of the three streams that form this 'highly fragmented yet intriguing novel'.² The novel's lack of plot development and its lack of structure also resembles jazz compositions.

The cultural and historical distance between the writer (jazz as something foreign) did not detract from the author's legitimate contribution to broadening the understanding of jazz. I wanted to see how an interpretation from the periphery of its culture would differ from one that originates in the jazz centres of America. The tension created through cultural and historical distance between writer and subject matter is replicated in the non-linear structure of *Jazz* as well as the absence of cause and effect relations throughout the novel. It was as if this mode of cultural production broadened the scope of artistic practice and that there was no effort to assert a single meaning to the work Seno created. A 'uniting essence' was either absent, undefined or obscured. It seemed to accept 'the death of the author' and that the reader could create an interpretation of the artistic product 'independent of any supposed intention of the author.'³ I considered this to be a liberating force in the process of understanding art.

My first reading of *Jazz* was limited by my inexperience in reading Indonesian literature and my lack of knowledge of literary theory. I read it as a collection of essays, not as a complete novel. My 'mis-reading' of it is reflected in the statement on the back cover, 'you can call it fiction or non-fiction – it's just a metropolitan novel.'⁴ But my first reading had disregarded its stated form as a

¹ The Dili massacre at Santa Cruz cemetery, on November 12, 1991.

² Marshall Clark, "Seno Gumira Ajidarma: An Indonesian Imagining East Timor" in *Review of Indonesian and Malay Affairs*, 33,2, 1999, p. 43.

³ Christopher Butler, *Postmodernism: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, p.23.

⁴ Seno Gumira Ajidarma, *Jazz, Parfum dan Insiden*, Yogyakarta: Yayasan Bentang Budaya, 1996, back cover.

novel (*oman*) and had treated the sections independently. Ironically, this method gave the 'chapters' (or are they essays?) a greater sense of unity. Considered singularly the chapters were unified, but if read as part of a whole, the work was discontinuous and confusing. However, as I was looking for a collection of impressions and not a unified narrative, I wasn't put off by the work's discordance and its oscillation between fiction and non-fiction. I concluded that how one evaluates a text, largely depends upon one's expectations about the conventions that the text will follow, and thus the reading process is subjective. Interpretations of literature are *recreations* – the reader is not a passive subject to the dictates of the author. An interpretation of a text can be as 'creative' as the process of writing fiction.

Most significantly though, Seno's style and insights made me remember his name. What Seno observed and how he described it presented a new literary experience. *Jazz* described fleeting moments of love, intense emotions and abrupt disconnections contrasted with brutal violence committed by a faceless, untouchable army. Seno's style was direct and he seemingly didn't engage in overt literary effects. The work didn't appear to be positioning itself as 'literature'. It seemed honest. His simple descriptions and juxtaposed subjects ironically suggested little authorial manipulation. The work seemed to have been reduced of artifice and in turn became a work more closely connected to the ideas conveyed by the writer. His short sentences and vivid imagery created a sense of immediacy that drew me into his narratives. These impressions contrast with my later observations of how his works refer to their own construction.

While in Medan during 2000 I read *Penembak Misterius*. This book was a defining moment in my interest in Indonesian literature. Like *Jazz*, several of the stories in this book were based on human rights abuses committed during the New Order era, however the political relevance of the stories escaped me as I read them as 'pure fiction.' Once again, I was struck by Seno's ability to present the complexity of the experience of *being in Indonesia* through his characteristically lucid language. His characters were enigmatic and often detached from their surroundings. His stories incorporated many of the contradictory emotions, ideas and traditions that were involved in what I imagined Indonesia to be. The characters' awareness of these contradictions didn't negate the legitimacy of their existence. They were resigned to living in a world that no longer provided them with a stable identity or consistent meaning for existence. How Seno negotiates some of these problems, is in essence what this thesis explores. My task is to ask how Seno has sought to represent a world that is in a constant state of flux, something we may not be able to give meaning to beyond the surface or perception. Seno's short stories made Indonesia make *more* sense to me, even when his stories avoided linear plots and deferred conclusions. Indeed, it may have been these features of his literature that contributed to my *making sense of Indonesia*.

It was only when I discovered the link between my first impressions of Seno's work and postmodernism that inspired my deeper curiosity into the dynamics of his fiction. Postmodern ideas seemed to provide a source for exploring Seno's work. I wanted to understand how Seno's works were postmodern. But, to see Seno's postmodernism separately from his social commentary would be to neglect the broader significance of his literature. As indicated by the title, in this thesis, I have tried to explore how Seno has used postmodern literary devices and philosophies against the pervasive authoritarianism of the New Order.

Seno's writings include journalism, short stories, film criticism⁵, poetry, and novels. The themes and styles of his works are diverse⁶ and complex, often combining traditionally separated genres. Or, as Pam Allen writes, Seno's style 'oscillates between realism, fantasy and reportage, often, in the best tradition of postmodernism, incorporating a variety of styles within one work.'⁷ Knowledge of the elements that unite Seno's varied output, will provide a more thorough framework for understanding his literature as a whole. I will do this through using postmodernist thought and literary practices as a set of references to apply to examples of Seno's fiction. Throughout this research, I will show examples of how Seno has used postmodern cultural practices to oppose the cultural and political ideologies of the New Order.

Whether Seno's stories are metaphysical explorations (re: *Negeri Kabut*⁸, *Manusia Kamar*⁹) or socially engaged criticisms of contemporary Indonesia (*Saksi Mata*¹⁰, *Iblis Tidak Pernah Mati*¹¹, *Jakarta 2039*) they provide excellent starting points to the understanding of contemporary Indonesian literature. His work is well received by many critics and is published in numerous national newspapers, magazines and journals. Marshall Clark has recognized how Seno has been able to include 'incisive social commentary' in both realist and anti-realist short stories.¹² He has a wild surrealist imagination, the ability to draw equally skillfully from indigenous traditions and from foreign popular culture, and (most importantly?) the ability to criticize a former authoritarian regime using language that is at times strident and at other times more subtle and indirect.

⁵ Seno Gumira Ajidarma, *Layar Kata: Menengok 20 Skenario Pemenang Citra Festival Film Indonesia 1973 – 1992*, Yogyakarta: Yayasan Bentang Budaya, 2000, and several essays on Garin Nugroho in, Philip Cheah et al, *Membaca Film Garin*, Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2002.

⁶ Seno's essays often complement his fictions, providing different perspectives on similar themes. For example "Jazz Mazhab Frankfurt: Sebuah Improvisasi", in *Kompas*, June 27, 1999 or "Palestine atawa Jurnalisme Komik" in *Aikon*, February 2002.

⁷ P.M.Allen, "Seno Gumira Ajidarma: Conscience of the People", in *New Zealand Journal of Asian Studies*, Volume 2, Number 2, December 2002, p. 177.

⁸ Seno Gumira Ajidarma, *Negeri Kabut*, Jakarta: Gramedia Widiasarana Indonesia, 1996.

⁹ Seno Gumira Ajidarma, *Manusia Kamar*, Jakarta: Haji Masagung, 1988.

¹⁰ Seno Gumira Ajidarma, *Saksi Mata*, Yogyakarta: Yayasan Bentang Budaya, second edition, 2002.

¹¹ Seno Gumira Ajidarma, *Iblis Tidak Pernah Mati*, Yogyakarta: Galang Press, 1999

Seno has been a critic of the New Order since the 1980s. It is true that many of his stories confronting the culture of the New Order came during its decline, but during this period (from the onset of the monetary crisis, 1997), Seno proved to be a vital witness to contemporary Indonesian history. His most famous short story collection *Saksi Mata* was published, though, before the decline of the New Order. He has covered subjects typically considered to be taboo: race, ethnicity, corruption and class identity. The necessary re-emergence of these subjects in Indonesian literature is an integral part of the current struggle to re-determine a national Indonesian identity, which for so long had been dominated by a regime which attempted to curb the spread of dissenting ideologies. Sapardi Djoko Damono writes that it is the function of literature to discuss issues of identity (religion, class, ethnicity); it is these elements that forge human experiences.¹³

However, to see Seno only as an oppositional figure outside of the New Order cultural milieu is not entirely accurate. As much as Seno has criticized the centralized New Order government and its authoritarian practices, he has been part of the mainstream of Indonesian literature for at least ten years. His employment at *Jakarta Jakarta* and *Citra* and his relative popularity allows for his articles to be frequently published in newspapers, tabloids, magazines and journals. His books frequently sell out and get republished in new editions. *Matinya Penari Telanjang*¹⁴ and *Saksi Mata* are two examples, which have been republished with minor alterations. Two short stories (*Jakarta 2039* and *Taxi Blues*) have been published in comic form, which have provided the comic artists with a potentially new and wider audience. But Seno's stability in the journalistic and literary fields does not necessarily diminish the validity of his criticisms of New Order cultural and political authoritarianism. His involvement in the *centre* of these fields may have assisted him in publishing articles that consistently condemned authoritarian practices. That he has been able to reach a broad audience strengthens the case for the study of his literature.

There are strong grounds for considering Seno's role as a socially engaged writer. Many of his works have addressed issues that are (or were) a part of Indonesian life during the social and political crisis during 1997 and 1998. What is the scope of features from New Order culture that Seno has criticized? Elements that have been opposed, whether it be through metaphor, ridicule or sarcasm vary in degree of seriousness. That is if, in this sense, 'seriousness' is taken to mean the closeness to which something is connected to violence. However, the problem is that determining where 'violence' begins and ends is not definite. In his literature Seno has focused on the plight of the Acehnese (*Telpon dari Aceh*), the East Timorese (*Saksi Mata, Jazz, Parfum dan Insiden*), the ethnic Chinese (*Jakarta 2039, Clara*) and those who suffer from poverty (*Seorang*

¹² Clark, 1999, p. 35.

¹³ Sapardi Djoko Damono, *Politik, Ideologi dan Sastra Hibrida*, Jakarta: Pustaka Firdaus, 1999. p. 87.

Wanita di Halte Bis, Loket). His stories have confronted mob violence (*Jakarta, Suatu Ketika*), corruption (*Darah itu Merah, Jenderal, Telpon dari Aceh*), conformism and financial greed (*Sarman, Helikopter*) and the troubles with romantic relationships (*Sebuah Pertanyaan Untuk Cinta, Atas Nama Malam*). Corruption, conformism, the suppression of ethnic or regional identity and financial greed all have an direct connection to the state violence that was prevalent throughout the New Order.

However, it should be noted that concern for these issues is not unique to Seno's literature. The fiction that confronted these issues was part of a broader shift to strengthening civil society. This included the proliferation of NGOs and student based groups that had grown disenchanted with the standard of national governance. Seno is also not the only writer to have discussed sensitive political issues. Damono states that it is difficult to find an Indonesian author who has not confronted these issues in their work and that sympathy for the 'underdog' is an important feature of many Indonesian writers' creative process.¹⁵ Writers Damono cites include Gerson Poyk, Idrus, Rendra, Taufiq Ismail and Arifin C. Noer.¹⁶ These are writers who belong to an older generation of writers whom may have influenced Seno's careers. They shouldn't be considered as the avant-garde of contemporary writers, which Seno may be. The interpretation of Seno's fiction requires awareness of two main features: what are the ideologies that he has confronted in his fiction, and how has he used new literary devices in his fiction?

Seno's fiction has been the source for research by various scholars. Michael Bodden and Marshall Clark have both 'cleared some space' for how Seno's fiction can be understood. However, the general lack of research published on him is one of the challenges that this research presents. This thesis sees Seno's postmodernist practices in four categories. Clark has addressed Seno's micronarratives and social engagement in 'Seno Gumira Ajidarma: An Indonesian Imagining East Timor'¹⁷ as well as the significance of metafiction and the character Wisanggeni in, 'Too Many Wisanggenis'.¹⁸

J. Joseph Errington¹⁹ has described Seno's opposition to the New Order based on the story, *Semangkin d/h semakin*²⁰. In this story Seno lampoons an accent similar to Suharto's. As this particular speech impediment is associated with the New Order political elite, the story is a direct

¹⁴ Seno Gumira Ajidarma, *Matinya Seorang Penari Telanjang*, Yogyakarta: Galang Press, 2000.

¹⁵ Damono, 1999, p. 87.

¹⁶ Damono, 1999, p. 87.

¹⁷ Clark, 1999.

¹⁸ Marshall Clark, 'Too Many Wisanggenis' to be published in *Indonesia and the Malay World*, Vol. 32, No. 92, March 2004.

¹⁹ J. Joseph Errington, *His Master's Voice: Listening to Power's Dialect in Suharto's Indonesia*, in *Crossroads* 15 (1): 1-8, Illinois: Center for Southeast Asian Studies, 2001.

²⁰ Seno Gumira Ajidarma, *Penembak Misterius*, Jakarta: Pustaka Utama Grafiti, 1993.

affront to Indonesia's political authorities. Seno's willingness to openly ridicule Suharto and figures connected to him, indicates the strength of his commitment to the establishment of democracy, as well as the strength of his perception and wit. A humorous story is used to convey a politically critical message. Errington describes the story as being an example of 'trenchant political satire built on a minor matter of dialect variation in the Indonesian language' and that it should be used to aid discussion 'about the legitimacy of public, authoritative voices in Suharto's Indonesia'.²¹ However, Errington's analysis is a concise description of the short story in which Seno mocks the language of government officials. Errington does not connect this story with other developments and social criticisms made in Seno's fiction. The strength of the essay is also its weakness, as it does not position the story in a broader context.

My argument that Seno used postmodernism to oppose New Order ideologies is evident both in the writings of Michael Bodden and Marshall Clark. Both have made the connection between postmodernism in Indonesia and how it provided critical commentary on the dominant cultural practices. For example, Clark has written

'During the heated debates on postmodernism in 1993 and 1994 in the Indonesian mass media, postmodernism was perceived by many to contain the potential for politically subversive discourse. In the context of the New Order regime's history of cultural and political totalitarianism in the name of 'development', 'stability' and 'modernization', postmodernism – with its attack on authoritarianism, elitism and hierarchy – promised to be an intellectual movement with clear political undertones.'²²

While Bodden has argued:

'among New Order Indonesian postmodernists, there was indeed a parallel tendency to envision some system of universal values or form of community as an alternative to the more particularistic visions of society that underlay the ideological foundations of the New Order state.'²³

Recently Bodden has written about Seno in terms of postmodernism, in which he questions its role in the establishment of democracy in Indonesia. This essay, published in Keith Foulcher and Tony Day's *Clearing a Space: Postcolonial Readings of Modern Indonesian Literature*, will form one of the specific points of reference in the latter discussion of Seno and postmodernity. Bodden has also recently published the third collection of English translations of stories by Seno.²⁴ The book focuses on Seno's writing from the time of the collapse of the New Order and its aftermath.

²¹ Errington, 2001, p. 1.

²² Marshall Clark "Smells of something like postmodernism" in Keith Foulcher, Tony Day (eds), *Clearing a Space: Postcolonial Readings of Contemporary Indonesian Literature*, Leiden: KITLV Press, 2002. p. 284.

²³ Michael Bodden, "Satuan-Satuan Kecil and uncomfortable improvisations in the late night of the New Order" in Foulcher, Day (eds), 2002, p. 294.

The novel *Jazz, Parfum dan Insiden* has been translated by Greg Harris and published through Lontar, while *Saksi Mata* was the first work of Seno's to be translated into English by Jan Lingard with Bibi Lanker and Suzan Piper.²⁵

Bodden has written that Seno should not be merely understood in terms of his opposition to the New Order and his engagement with social and political issues.²⁶ This stresses the importance of a new publication featuring translated stories that are not specifically political in content. The three books available in English are all connected to the political context at the time of their writing: *Eyewitness and Jazz, Perfume and the Incident* (East Timor, 1991-2) and *Jakarta at a Certain Point in Time* (1997-now). Without questioning the importance of these translations, it should be pointed out that Seno himself has sought to emphasize the equal importance of his more surrealist and abstract stories to those of explicit political content. He has also stated that it may be possible to see his efforts in outing the stories of the Dili massacre as a personal conflict between himself and those that tried to censor him at *Jakarta Jakarta*.²⁷ It is a moot point whether his most significant works are those that are relatively independent of the social and political context, or those that delve into political problems. However, the focus of this thesis is to touch upon his works which show traces of postmodernism and how he has used postmodernist practice as part of his opposition to New Order ideologies.

Faruk, a critic who has written much on postmodernism in Indonesia, has observed how Seno has questioned notions about textual stability. Faruk writes that it is the self-awareness of Seno's texts (*sifat dasar-diri*) that is their most distinctive feature.²⁸ He has compared Seno's stories against others, which describe something that exists beyond the story, 'the imaginary world in short stories exist independently, without any mediation.'²⁹ Faruk gives the example of *Writing Lesson*³⁰ to show where Seno has explored the difference between reality and representations of it. Faruk argues that Seno's stories show the text to be 'not a neutral tool which is subordinate to the strengths outside of itself, whether it be the subjective demands of the author or the objective

²⁴ Seno Gumira Ajidarma, *Jakarta at a Certain Point in Time: Fiction, Essays and a Play from the Post-Suharto Era in Indonesia* (translated and introduced by Michael H. Bodden) British Columbia: Centre for Asia-Pacific Initiatives, 2002.

²⁵ Ron Witton, "History with the Right and Left Brain" in *Inside Indonesia*, 46.

²⁶ Michael Bodden, "Seno Gumira Ajidarma and Fictional Resistance to an Authoritarian State in 1990s Indonesia", *Indonesia* 68 (October 1999). p. 154.

²⁷ Seno Gumira Ajidarma, "Fiction, Journalism, History: A Process of Self-Correction" in *Indonesia*, 68, October 1999, p. 169.

²⁸ Faruk H.T., 'Cerpen-cerpen pilihan Kompas 1992-1996', in *Kompas, Pistol Perdamaian*, Jakarta: Kompas, 1996, p.159.

²⁹ Faruk, 1996, p. 159.

³⁰ Seno Gumira Ajidarma, "Pelajaran Mengarang", in *Pelajaran Mengarang, Cerpen Pilihan Kompas 1993*, Jakarta: Kompas, 1993. p. 9.

demands that are outside of the text and the author's subjectivity.³¹ Faruk concludes by saying that other authors tend to accept the supposed transparency of the text.

Without stating it explicitly Faruk also suggests the subversive power of Seno's questioning of a text's ability to represent reality. He writes that because the text is problematized, so too is our understanding of reality: reality itself is shown to be something that is constructed from a certain perspective, from a certain ideological point of view.³² This is part of Seno's awareness of plural truths and plural lies (*kesemuan yang jamak*). The stories (*Writing Lesson*, *Clandestine* and *Sukab and a Pair of Shoes*) that Faruk links to metafiction, are not connected to their politically subversive powers. It is as if the literature is divorced from its social context. The novelty of Seno's fiction, in this case, is limited to its new literary practices rather than their ability to confront oppressive ideologies. This is one difference which separates the criticism of Clark and Bodden with that of Faruk.

Another leading critic of postmodernism in Indonesia, Nirwan Dewanto has also written of the instability within Seno's texts. According to Dewanto, 'Seno does not objectify – or engineer – a [independent and stable] world in his short stories. The world itself is something that is truly living, moving and breathing. That world is not complete and certain at the time the writing process begins, but a world which is created, and develops with the flow of Seno's thoughts.'³³ In chapter three, I discuss how Seno shows the author's interference to intrude upon the text and upon the stability of the representation. Dewanto has also referred to Seno's combination of different styles present in his work. For example, he cites the surrealism of *A Slice of Sunset for my Girlfriend*³⁴ or *Ears* and the realism of *Maria* (all three of which are from *Saksi Mata*). Dewanto considers Seno's fiction to be important as 'the purpose of fiction is not to affirm, but to doubt what we consider to be the truth of an event.'³⁵

Seno's stories on East Timor have attracted the most frequent academic attention. Important essays include those written by Marshall Clark, Michael Bodden and Rudiawan. Both Clark and Rudiawan discuss Seno's works (*Saksi Mata* and *Jazz, Parfum dan Insiden*) in terms of how his stories represent the voices of the silenced and oppressed East Timorese. Bodden, in his chapter, *Satuan-satuan Kecil and uncomfortable improvisations in the late night of the New Order*³⁶, sees *Jazz, Parfum dan Insiden*, in terms of its postmodern literary features. Bodden

³¹ Faruk, 1996, p. 160.

³² Faruk, 1996, p. 161.

³³ Nirwan Dewanto, "Cerpen-cerpen terbaik Kompas 1992" in *Pelajaran Mengarang, Cerpen Pilihan Kompas 1993*, Jakarta: Kompas, 1993, p.5.

³⁴ Seno Gumira Ajidarma, *Sepotong Senja Untuk Pacarku*, Jakarta: Gramedia Pustaka Utama, 2002.

³⁵ Dewanto, 1993, p. 5.

³⁶ Bodden, in Foulcher and Day, 2002.

positions Seno alongside other postmodernists such as Afrizal Malna and Nirwan Dewanto. He explains, 'this [emergence of] Indonesian postmodernism was both an effort to produce new discourses and practices of resistance to the pervasive social and cultural manifestations of President Suharto's authoritarian regime.'³⁷

Michael Bodden, in the introduction to the latest collection of translated stories by Seno, writes that 'part of Seno's oeuvre to date can be viewed as a register of middle-class artistic modes of resistance to the NO' and that he is a writer of 'virtuosity and diverse talents.'³⁸ Elsewhere, J.J. Errington has noted that Seno is 'widely known for his amusing and often pointed short stories about politics and society during Indonesia's New Order era.'³⁹

Korrie Layun Rampan, in his anthology of contemporary Indonesian fiction, regards Seno as being a significant part of the group known as the 'generation of 200' (*angkatan 2000*). The choices of Seno's work used in the anthology do not really reflect the issues that Seno is most acclaimed for. In the introduction to *Angkatan 2000*, Rampan connects postmodern aspects of Seno's work with Indonesia's oral literary tradition. For example, in reference presumably to the *Cerita untuk Alina* (Stories for Alina) section of *Penembak Misterius*, Rampan has written: 'in several stories, the words of a troubadour start the story as a story teller'.⁴⁰ Rampan has claimed that, after placing Seno at the forefront of contemporary short story writers, that he has 'renewed the aesthetic field of his forbears with a new mode of expression.'⁴¹ He writes that a strength of Seno's work is that his characters are realistic (although, he doesn't give examples or a comparison), that they are ordinary people involved in ordinary events: 'even though the reality that he creates is occasionally surrealistic and absurd, his characters feel realistic, because they are created from reality.'⁴² Rampan cites the presence of humour in his fictions: 'Seno's fiction interprets events with satire and irony.'⁴³ Again, no example is given, but there are humorous elements in stories such as *Helikopter* or *Semangkin d/h Semakin*. Rampan argues that Seno has returned to a 'purer' kind of literary form, that he has 'developed a new aesthetic in an interesting way by returning to pure literature, which does not differentiate between prose and poetry.'⁴⁴ This reflects with Seno's own statement that he has tried to incorporate poetry into his

³⁷ Bodden, 2002, p. 293.

³⁸ Ajidarma, 2002, p.2.

³⁹ Errington, 2001, p.1.

⁴⁰ Korrie Layun Rampan, *Angkatan 2000 dalam Sastra indonesia*, Jakarta: Pustaka Populer Gramedia, 2001. p. 23.

⁴¹ Rampan, 2001, p.23.

⁴² Rampan, 2001, p. 23.

⁴³ Rampan, 2001, p. 24.

⁴⁴ Rampan, 2001p. 26.

short stories, that is, even though the final form is a 'short story', he had the aesthetics of poetry in mind, while writing.⁴⁵

Until recently, one aspect of Seno's literature that had not been discussed is the graphics and typography of his books. However, Marshall Clark discusses the presence of drawings in his essay, *Too Many Wisanggenis*.⁴⁶ In this essay, Clark discusses the drawings by Danarto in *Wisanggeni, Sang Buronan*. In the final part of chapter three, I discuss the drawings in works such as *Jakarta 2039* and *Kematian Donny Osmond*. The page layout of *Seorang Wanita Memetik Gitar*⁴⁷ and the comic style graphics of *Jakarta, 2039*⁴⁸ are an essential part of Seno's attempt to renew the form and contents of what is accepted as Indonesian literature. The style of graphics and typography (the re-orientation of focus point, the disturbance of the eye's path), the presence of literary collage and Seno's avoidance of linear plot development and specific conclusions are features that have been identified with postmodern literature. My thesis will argue that through using aspects of postmodern literary practices, Seno has been able to oppose New Order ideologies and cultural politics. My thesis will focus on his works that are, for one reason or another, are postmodern. These works include *Kematian Donny Osmond*, *Jakarta 2039* and some stories in the *Penembak Misterius* collection. I will place Seno's work against the backdrop of developments in literature since 1966, as well as in terms of the dominant features of New Order ideology and cultural politics. Although arguing that Seno's work shares features of postmodern literary practice, it will also acknowledge aspects of his work that diverge from common features of postmodern literature.

If postmodern fiction has removed itself from having any didactic function, is Seno's social commentary a break away from typical postmodern forms, found in European and American cultures? Is Seno's use of postmodern practices a means of opposition towards rigid authoritarianism – at not only an abstract and philosophical level, but also at an immediate politically confrontational level? The difference between Western and Indonesian postmodern practices has been recognised by Marshall Clark, who writes: 'it should come as no surprise to find that the similarities between Western postmodernism and the late New Order cultural practice are often partial and incomplete.'⁴⁹ Do postmodern practices enhance the literary aesthetics in contemporary Indonesian literature? Does Seno's literature represent a type of postmodernism with social agency? Does it contribute to the destabilizing of the ideologies

⁴⁵ Interview with Ajidarma, Jakarta, 4.6.03

⁴⁶ Marshall Clark, "Too Many Wisanggenis: Reinventing The Wayang at the Turn of the Century", to be published in *Indonesia and the Malay World*, Vol. 32, No. 92, March 2004.

⁴⁷ Seno Gumira Ajidarma, *Kematian Donny Osmond*, Jakarta: Gramedia Pustaka Utama, 2001, p. 114.

⁴⁸ Seno Gumira Ajidarma, *Jakarta 2039: 40 tahun, 9 bulan sesudah 13-14 Mei 1998*, Yogyakarta: Galang Press, 2001.

⁴⁹ Clark, in Foulcher and Day, 2002, p. 285.

(metanarratives) that has subordinated certain ethnic, religious or social groups? What are the opportunities his literature presents for aesthetic and ideological disturbances in Indonesian literature? What are the unique features to Seno's literature?

Seno has used traditional themes in several of his works. He is one author amongst others, who have included Emha Ainun Nadjib and Agusta Wibisono to have used *wayang* themes.⁵⁰ The dichotomies of 'traditional' and 'modern' established in the New Order context are also challenged through Seno's writings. His engagement with traditional stories rejects the New Order ideology assigned to indigenous traditions within Indonesia. Seno's interest in the *wayang* is most evident through his exploration of Kosasih's comics, the *Surat Dari Palmerah* editorials and *Wisanggeni*, *Sang Buronan*. In numerous editorials published in *Jakarta-Jakarta*, Seno borrows stories from the Javanese *wayang* interpretations of the Mahabharata and Ramayana. In the 'letters' addressed to a man known as *Bung*, Seno indirectly criticizes the ethics and behavior of current politicians. These *wayang*-based editorials include: *Politik dan Wayang*, *Politik Kresna* and *Dua Wajah Kresna*.⁵¹ Also drawing on *wayang*, Seno has written a novel with its central character as Wisanggeni, a native Indonesian character of the *wayang*.⁵² Seno's letters published in *Jakarta-Jakarta* and his novel *Wisanggeni*, *Sang Buronan* are one example of the reinvigoration of traditional methods for conveying political criticism.

The traditional elements (in this case, *wayang kulit*, Ramayana, Mahabharata) are no longer a *benda mati* (an inanimate object). Borrowing from this important part of Javanese culture criticises a culture that has promoted Javanese-ness as a kind of Indonesian orthodoxy.⁵³ Using the *wayang* as a source for contemporary political criticism, also implies a criticism of how we define 'modern'. That is, there are no clearly defined boundaries between what is modern and what is traditional. In *Wisanggeni*, Seno takes his appropriation of *wayang* further: he does not merely draw on its morals, he recreates aspects of the story, rather than merely repeating the established roles given to Ramayana/Mahabharata characters. The *Surat dari Palmerah*, act as explicit opinion pieces, the philosophical aspects are subordinated in priority of a political message. *Wayang* stories develop in an often surrealist and absurdist world, where strict correlation of cause and effect are irrelevant, while the 'modern' world is one based on logic, reason and rationality. This significance of drawing upon tradition is to do with how Seno has made it relevant to the contemporary situation. Faruk H.T. explains that currently:

⁵⁰ Marshall Clark, "Shadow Boxing: Indonesian Writers and the Ramayana in the New Order" in *Indonesia*, 72, October 2001, p. 160.

⁵¹ Seno Gumira Ajidarma, *Surat Dari Palmerah: Indonesia dalam Politik Mehong 1996-1999*, Jakarta: Kepustakaan Populer Gramedia, 2002.

⁵² Seno Gumira Ajidarma, *Wisanggeni, Sang Buronan*, Yogyakarta: Yayasan Bentang Budaya, 2000.

⁵³ Clark, 2004, p. 2.

'tradition is generally understood and treated as an inanimate object, originating from the past, that is no longer relevant in the contemporary era. Thus it needs to be protected or exhibited in various forms of ceremonies. On the other hand, modernity is understood to be a living cultural process, which moves, and is shaped and developed.'⁵⁴

It is this dichotomy that the traditional stories seek to break. It might well be witty to use Javanese tradition as a means to criticise the Javanese New Order, however it could be more subversive if Seno was able to make non-Javanese traditions more pertinent to the contemporary Indonesian condition. Through relying on Javanese traditions, in a way, he helps emphasise its cultural dominance on Indonesian intellectual activity.

My interest in Seno's works rests not only with his postmodernness, but also with his involvement with issues which are apposite to contemporary Indonesia. I regard his activism as being essential to developing the current political discourse in order to generate a more critical and self-aware dialogue that may lead to a resolution of current political and cultural crises affecting Indonesia. Throughout this section, in particular, I frequently use the terms 'social commitment' or 'socially critical'. These terms sound a little awkward, abstract, and even outdated, however it is my argument that Seno's interest in the suffering of those around him and those who have been neglected by the dominant political paradigm, gives added validity to his consistent and accomplished writing style. I use the term 'social commitment' with full recognition that it was in Keith Foulcher's book, 'Lekra and Social Commitment in the Arts'⁵⁵ that the term has become mainly associated with Indonesian literature. Generally, I use the term to refer to his works which rely on an understanding of the context they were produced in for a fuller comprehension. That is, there is a strong degree of external dependence. The 'socially committed' stories engage in a dialogue that pits the broad and dominant cultural values against the ideas and ethics of an individuals who seeks to promote the aspirations of the neglected masses.

I am claiming that Seno's work has a postmodern dominant. My argument is based around proving the presence of four distinct aspect of postmodernism which appear throughout various examples of Seno's fiction over a number of years. These four aspects are the representation of micronarratives, characterisation, references to the text's fictionality and finally an engagement with popular culture. In the first chapter, I discuss the ideas of postmodernism, modernism and postmodern literature. In the second, I give the social and cultural background of the New Order.

⁵⁴ Faruk H.T., *Beyond Imagination: Sastra Mutakhir dan Ideologi*, Yogyakarta: Gama Media, 2001., p. 16-17.

⁵⁵ Keith Foulcher, *Social Commitment in Literature and the Arts: The Indonesian 'Institute of People's Culture', 1950-1965*, Clayton: Centre of Southeast Asian Studies, Monash University, 1986.

Then, in chapter three, I use the ideas from the first chapter to show how they appear in Seno's fiction and how they oppose the ideologies of the New Order government. Finally, the conclusion makes some statements about the presence of postmodernism in Indonesian literature.

Chapter One

Postmodernism

This chapter introduces some aspects of postmodern discourse. I will outline how various prominent figures in the debate on postmodern theory have applied different meanings to it, over different periods. Theorists have characterised postmodernism by its varying features and thus definitions often have different emphases. Although the term 'postmodern' existed before the 1960s, my introduction focuses on debates that developed in the 1960s and have persisted until the 1980s and 1990s. I will undoubtedly exclude some key players in the debate; however, this is due to an emphasis on extracting the dominant trends in postmodern thought, rather than outlining all of the dynamics of an often-perplexing debate. My aim is to provide a *working definition* which can then be applied to the example of Indonesian literature I have chosen as reflecting the *postmodern condition* or works that use postmodern literary practices.

Postmodernity is marked by mass incoherence, general discontinuity and self-acknowledged discordance. It is a time when theorists, writers and artists have doubted the ambitions of modernity. Postmodernist thought seeks to deny the false and elitist ambitions of modernism arguing that their claims to logic, rationale and universality are instead subjective. Literature is one medium through which these doubts have been expressed. Some traits of the postmodern literature include, the foregrounding of the writing process, negating the stability of its characters, absorbing historical information into 'fictional' forms and appropriating popular culture genres. These features and others will be discussed in the third part of this chapter.

Discordance, confusion and irregularity, some have argued, are the dominant traits of the contemporary world. There is an inability to reach an all-consuming narrative to make sense of the world. The modern world has been stripped of what is *given* and predictable. Nothing can be taken for granted. Also, nothing is beyond ridicule: nothing is sacred – every value system and all types of social mores are susceptible to being turned on their head. It is these traits that mark the postmodern condition, from which the postmodern arts are born. Broad declarations about the impossibility of consistency and the redundancy of transcendental truths may be a safeguard to ensuring postmodernism's defence against its critics. If it does not make claims to asserting a positive alternative to what it seeks to bring down, postmodernism cannot be criticised for not doing what it did not set out to do. Postmodernism plays by its own rules and its own conventions. Part of the purpose of this thesis is to find out whether the conventions of postmodernism and whatever its ambitions may be, are useful in understanding contemporary Indonesian fiction and whether these 'rules' make sense in the Indonesian context.

The technological developments brought on by modernism may not have provided the solutions it was hoped to. Access to all kinds of information has made so much information available, making sense of it all is extremely difficult. There is now no excuse for not knowing something. So, in a sense problems lie with the critics rather than artists. Critics have to adapt their criticisms in a response to the redefinitions of creative possibilities. Critics have to be a generalist and have mastered a specific subject as well. There are no limits to what can or should be known. Interest in a subject requires full interest in it. There is no longer any option of taking a passing interest in something, or having a hobby. Also, anyone can become a filmmaker and everyone can be a photographer, anyone can have his or her writings published on the Internet. The barriers posed by production have withered, but the end result is possibly even more confusing for critics of the arts. The advances in technology allow for any photograph to be manipulated into something appealing and apparently artistic. Everybody can become an artist, but at the same time no one is because the sense of craft and aesthetic training has been wiped out via the ease of creating a final watchable, viewable product. The mass spreading of instant 'artists' is not necessarily a bad thing. And I do not seek to assert that 'making art' should be the realm of a select and privileged avant-garde. What needs to be pointed out though is that things have changed. The easing of the effort required to 'create art' is also a reflection of the postmodern condition. Viewers, listeners, readers and any sort of connoisseurs are faced with an imaginably immense task of ordering it and giving meaning to it.

Postmodern works refer to past art forms and styles without a sense of sentimentality. The past is forced upon the viewer disrupting their expectation that what one sees should be something new and should distance itself from previous aesthetic achievements. Some examples of visual postmodern works are decidedly simple: it is as if they are reduced of their artistic interference or adaptation. The viewer may feel the need to ask, 'what is there to appreciate?' In certain works, viewers are challenged by the presence of an un-altered everyday object before them. Viewers may become dismayed or disappointed by the non-creativity of the 'artist's' creation. Different from modernism, postmodernism is marked by the 'shock of the past', the 'shock of repetition' and the 'shock of the kitsch'.

Should all of the principles of postmodernism be accepted or just a few? Who are the antagonists of the postmodern debate? What are the main contested ideas? Is a recognition or acceptance of certain basic precepts of postmodernism essential to our intellectual liberation? Is postmodernism mere artistic, aesthetic and intellectual escapism?

An introduction to postmodernism first requires identifying some main features of modernism. This definition is essential to decide whether postmodernism is a break from or an engagement with modernism. However, the definition is nothing more than introductory. This definition gives the main features of modernism which I consider postmodernism to be rejecting or acting against. I acknowledge that further research should be done to understand the modern-postmodern split (or continuation) in Indonesian literature. This inquiry into the modern-postmodern divide should include a comparison between an exemplary modern and postmodern text.

Modernism

The key concepts of this section are modernity, modernism and modernist literature. These concepts will form the basis of my discussion which outlines the changes from 'the modern' to 'the postmodern'.

The initial meaning of 'modern' was close to the current use of 'contemporary'. Raymond Williams writes that in the 19th and 20th centuries the word became almost exclusively favourable. It was a term connected with the ideas of scientific and technological progress. To 'modernize' something became a synonym for 'improve'. Williams writes: 'modernism and modernist have become more specialized, to particular tendencies, notably to the experimental art and writing of c.1890 – c. 1940, which allows a subsequent distinction between the modernist and the newly modern.'⁵⁶ To be a modernist, is to be an advocate of the tendencies and implications of modernism as positive and beneficial to contemporary life. Being a modernist goes beyond mere acceptance and comfort within the 'modern' world.

Modernity is evident in the new technologies available to mankind. In the beginning of the 20th century and earlier, man obtained many new ways of travelling: the car, train and airplane. The production of these vehicles was made possible through the availability of new materials to be used in construction. These included steel, reinforced concrete and plate glass which could be used to aid mass production to serve mass-consumerism. Taylor and Ford became the founders of new ways of organizing large numbers of workers, through the ideas of applying scientific principles to the workplace and the production line, respectively.⁵⁷ The time it took to produce large quantities of goods was drastically reduced. Through the developments in modes of travel and production, modernity was associated with speed and progress. These changes were considered positive. Aside from speed and progress, modernity is connected to the rise of capitalism. A new type of mega-entrepreneur sponsored technological developments – figures

⁵⁶ Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, Suffolk: Flamingo, 1976, p. 208.

⁵⁷ Chris Rodriguez and Chris Garratt, *Introducing Modernism*, London: Icon Books, 2001, p. 18.

such as Henry Rockefeller and John Pierpont Morgan.⁵⁸ Modernity not only aided new experiences in the world through easier travel, but also created new opportunities for extraordinary levels of money making. Modernity's positive status was sealed: it was conducive to both intellectual and material satisfaction.

Modern art and literature is marked by its difficulty, by its confrontation with the expectations of viewers or readers. As the art critic, Robert Hughes, puts it, it is 'the shock of the new.'⁵⁹ A modernist work asserts its novelty through creating something unfamiliar and different: its meaning is determined by its novelty.⁶⁰ There is a self-proclaimed newness and strong self-confidence in the integrity of the work and in the importance of being an artist. Declarations of modernist movements were made through manifestos to assert the need for aesthetic change, as a way to show the unity of thought and action.⁶¹ Modern art also reflects the technological developments of modernity that have allowed for new ways of looking at the world. To be modern is to show one's control over one's existence through a process of logic and rationale. Belief in progress and the continuation of the ideas of the Enlightenment pervades modernism.⁶²

Tim Woods sets out some significant points that postmodernism engages with. A doyen of the debate on postmodernism, Ihab Hassan has produced a widely cited list of characteristics common to modernism with their opposites countered by postmodern cultural practices.⁶³ The list is qualified by the statement that features of modernism move vertically or according to hierarchy, while postmodernist features move laterally. Hassan's list suggests that modernism is characterized by an emphasis on *form* – cultural products are fixed to a specific genre. While postmodernism is *antiform* – there is an openness to influences coming from outside traditionally accepted areas of artistic production. Postmodernism is concerned with surface, while modernism is concerned with depth. Depth stipulates interpretation, while emphasis on *surface* and the methods of representation doubts the usefulness of interpretation. Woods suggests that Hassan has an 'unspoken approval of the characteristics in the right-hand column (the postmodern column), suggesting that postmodernism is a "good thing" and that it is just as well that modernism has been superseded.'⁶⁴

Marcel Duchamp's ready-mades sought to pose questions of how aesthetic value was given to an 'artistic' object. The questioning of how the world is perceived is evident in the emergence of

⁵⁸ Rodriguez, 2001, p. 19.

⁵⁹ Robert Hughes, *The Shock of the New*, London: BBC, 1980.

⁶⁰ Rodriguez, 2001, p. 4.

⁶¹ Rodriguez, 2001, p. 42.

⁶² Rodriguez, 2001, p. 27.

⁶³ Ihab Hassan in Woods, 1999, p. 60.

⁶⁴ Woods, 1999, p. 60

cubism, where 'objects are presented as a series of discontinuous, fractured planes, all equidistant from the viewer'.⁶⁵ Gustave Courbet and Edouard Manet's provocative subject matter were forerunners to modernism, but were still aimed at challenging the validity of what could be included in an artwork. Modern architecture was identifiable by its incorporation of basic geometric shapes, which were supposed to suggest notions of 'a rationalist, progressive society'.⁶⁶ Modernism emphasised functionality and the eradication of extraneous decoration. Houses were considered to be 'machines for living in' and had to be built according to their specific functionality.

The use of 'deliberately discontinuous narratives' in modern literature suggested the break up of previously accepted modes of thought and belief.⁶⁷ Modernism enforced a clear demarcation between high and low forms of culture, and within those categories: 'intellectual distinctions were made between atonal electronic music like Karlheinz Stockhausen's and modern jazz, or between modern jazz and rock or between rock and pop etc'. It also moved towards attempting to understand 'non-western' cultural forms.⁶⁸ This is evident in Picasso's interest in African art forms, or Claude Debussy's interest in Javanese gamelan.

What is modern literature? Texts which involve difficult reading: modern literature requires a struggle to reach an understanding of what the text is about. The meaning of the text is not immediately clear to the reader and it has to be analysed and placed in its context for its 'meaning' to emerge. Such a definition places faith in the presence of 'meaning' beneath the complexities of the characters and the text's plot. Thus there is a belief in the usefulness of interpreting a text. Readers interpret novels such as Albert Camus's *L'Etranger* to realise that it is not simply about a murder and the punishment of the perpetrator. Readers are required to look beneath the novel's events and to see that it is at least in part about a man who is isolated from the modern world and who refuses to behave according to the expectations imposed on him by the society that surrounds him.

Hal Foster sees modernism's connection to the rationality espoused in the Enlightenment. Thus, this included the need to 'develop the spheres of science, morality and art according to their inner logic'.⁶⁹ That is, the task of the artist was to wage an inner struggle in order to achieve an artistic, moral or scientific purity. The pure essence of each field would in turn be something universal: something that existed beyond time and context. This pure, enlightened art would develop in a

⁶⁵ Woods, 1999, p. 7.

⁶⁶ Woods, 1999, p. 7.

⁶⁷ Woods, 1999, p. 7.

⁶⁸ Woods, 1999, p. 7.

sphere 'resisting the threats from kitsch on one side and academe on the other.'⁷⁰ Sabina Lovibond states that the 'Enlightenment pictured the human race as engaged in an effort towards universal moral and intellectual self-realization, and so as the subject of a universal historical experience; it also postulated a universal human reason in terms of which social and political tendencies could be assessed as 'progressive' or otherwise.'⁷¹ Modernism facilitated the elevation of the artist to the status of being a cultural hero. The artist's role was to stand outside of his society and offer critical comments looking in, as Duchamp had done through his ready-mades in the visual arts sphere. Artists were supposed to be independent of society's politics, operating in a field free from obvious political interference.

The concept of the avant-garde is central to modernism. The avant-garde were those who pushed the boundaries of aesthetic and literary practice: those who kept the new *shocking*. Postmodern art on the other hand, rejects this belief in the concentration of aesthetic development and the romanticisation of an elite group of outsider artists looking in and criticising the mainstream and dominant society. Artistic expression exists everywhere and there are no pre-requisites essential for legitimate aesthetic practice. An engagement with the market is not regarded as a negative influence upon the artist's ability to create works based on moments of intuitive insight. In this sense, postmodernism creates room for art to come from the centre of society. Thus, it is susceptible to being used by those who are part of the 'dominant' culture and who then further restrict and ostracise those on the society's periphery. To understand postmodernism's political ambivalence and deconstructive capabilities I will now introduce various aspects of postmodernism.

Postmodern Theory

This introduction aims to present a discussion of ideas associated with 'postmodernism'. In the second part I will discuss how these concepts have become evident in literary works since the 1960s. It will also attempt to point to variations in definitions given to postmodernism, as well as some of its subcategories. The definition I use will not assert that postmodernism is an unvarying entity that maintains the same form and function across different cultures. This is in part evident in the fabulist literature of South America, frequently identified as postmodern.⁷² It is accepted that ideas associated with postmodernism may become more influential depending on the time

⁶⁹ Hal Foster (ed), *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, Washington: Bay Press, 1983.1983, p. x.

⁷⁰ Foster, 1983.p. x.

⁷¹ Sabina Lovibond, in Woods, 1999, p. 9.

⁷² For example Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Mario Vargas Llosa.

and place of their emergence. This is to say that the function and form of 'postmodernism' is subjective; it is adopted in idiosyncratic ways.

Eagleton defines the more general term 'postmodernity' as meaning 'the end of modernity, in the sense of those grand narratives of truth, reason, science, progress and universal emancipation which are taken to characterize modern thought from the Enlightenment onwards.'⁷³ Postmodernists believe, in Eagleton's words that 'our forms of life are relative, ungrounded, self-sustaining, made up of mere cultural convention and tradition without any identifiable origin or grandiose goal'⁷⁴ – or as according to Baudrillard, 'the idea of progress is dead.'⁷⁵

'Postmodernism' is used to indicate cultural expressions derived from the postmodern condition. It is thus a 'cultural' or 'aesthetic' term, whereas postmodernity' is a 'historical, philosophical term'.⁷⁶ Eagleton defines postmodern art or literature as work that expresses its 'distaste for fixed boundaries and categories on the traditional distinction between high and popular art, deconstructing the borderline between them by producing artifacts which are self-consciously populist vernacular, or which offer themselves as commodities of pleasurable consumption.' Postmodernism seeks to dismantle the intimidating aura of high-modernist culture with a more demotic user friendly art, suspecting all hierarchies of value as privileged and elitist.⁷⁷

Jean-Francois Lyotard, who is regarded as a pioneer of postmodern thought defined it simply as 'incredulity towards metanarratives.'⁷⁸ Lyotard believes that a work of literature or art can only 'become modern only if it is first postmodern.'⁷⁹ And that the postmodern condition is 'characterized by a breakdown of Western master narratives and the withering of their historical codes and explanatory power.'⁸⁰ A metanarrative was anything that gave a total explanation of existence or how the status quo could be changed. Concepts of religion, science and ideology were no longer considered to be able to provide accurate insights to the world. Postmodernism accepts that there is an irreducible gap between the world and narratives which seek to define it.

It might be more useful to argue that rather than having become redundant, grand narratives have become more difficult to distinguish from other narratives that were formerly considered to be subjective and particularistic. In particular this refers to those coming from the postcolonial

⁷³ Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996, p. 200.

⁷⁴ Eagleton, 1996, p. 201.

⁷⁵ Barry Smart, "Postmodern Social Theory" in Bryan S. Turner (ed) *The Blackwell Companion to Social Theory*, London: Blackwell, 1998.

⁷⁶ Eagleton, 1996, 200.

⁷⁷ Eagleton, 1996, 202.

⁷⁸ Butler, 2002, p. 13.

⁷⁹ Astradur Eysteinnsson, *The Concept of Modernism*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990, p.107.

⁸⁰ Eysteinnsson, 1990, p. 108.

world, which under colonialist discourse had been 'othered' and positioned as being all that the Occidental world is not. Grand narratives have not necessarily died but have become increasingly common: the old ones have been replaced by new ones and in other cases the 'old' grand narratives have been re-invigorated and renewed. The competition for general frameworks for understanding the world has become more complex with more grand narratives. Grand narratives persist now more than ever and thus for a state of plural grand narratives, those on the periphery need to assert their identities as strongly as possible.

Lyotard argued that postmodernism explicitly targets metanarratives. He argues that the postmodern condition is 'characterized by a breakdown of Western metanarratives and the withering of their historical codes and explanatory power.'⁸¹ Metanarratives are established and maintained in order to legitimize and give authority to certain cultural practices over others.⁸² They are intricately intertwined with the dominant ideology of the relevant state. In any given context, there is a hierarchy of accepted metanarratives. Thus, some metanarratives are more susceptible to being dislodged than others. Postmodernism undermines narratives that believe in the progressive emancipation of mankind.

Postmodernism is connected to both postcolonialism and feminism.⁸³ In both cases, it is due to the ability of postmodernism to side with those who have had their narratives represented by others, through an act of 'writing back to the empire' [those who represent the dominant paradigms]. Certainly, not all postcolonial literature uses postmodern literary practices, but there are specific and well-documented cases of cross-overs between these two discourses on contemporary ways of being. Two such examples are Salman Rushdie and Peter Carey.⁸⁴ In regards to feminism, postmodernism's idea of subjectivity, relativity and the end of grand narratives has helped to fuel feminist deconstructions of hegemonic patriarchal societies. Again, this relationship is neither fully binding or one of honest fidelity, as postmodernists can equally dismiss the grand narratives of the feminist discourses as has been done to earlier patriarchal ones.

Postmodernism rejects modernism's conviction of belief in the elevating role of the artist and art. A question partly posed by the realisation that Nazi prison commanders were connoisseurs of literature, art and music has complicated attempts to make claims for the effects of particular

⁸¹ Eysteinsson, 1990, p. 108.

⁸² Butler, 2002, p. 13.

⁸³ Budi Darma, "Ironi Si Kembar Siam: Tentang Posmo dan Kajian Budaya", in *Kalam*, 18, 2001, p.164.

⁸⁴ Hermine Krassnitzer, *Aspects of Narration in Peter Carey's Novels: Deconstructing Colonialism*, New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1995.

sorts of study.⁸⁵ Postmodernism doubts the legitimacy of the dominant notion of artist (as an independent individual creating original works) and the intellectually or spiritually elevating function it may provide in contemporary society. It is thus no surprise to encounter postmodern works of art, literature or architecture that are kitsch. They are kitsch in that there is a blatant statement of a denial of a unified aesthetic; there is a proud and ostentatious incoherence of style.

Postmodernism, in its various forms has become international. Writers from all over the world have made contributions to the emergence and development of postmodern literature. Partly due to the varying ways in which the term is used and the multiplicity of 'postmodern' art forms, architecture and fiction, the term may inspire positive or negative connotations. As a result, 'postmodernism' presents itself as an intellectual challenge to those that oppose it and those that embrace aspects of its spirit. The challenge faced is to remove its weaknesses (its overt contradictions?) and capitalize on its strengths (its oppositional, anti-metanarrative verve?). Is it possible to glean postmodernism of its positive features now that its moment of fashion and newness is on the wane? Can its strengths be salvaged?

Harry Levin regards modernism as the 'superior father' to its 'bastard child' of postmodernism. He considers progressions in postmodernist thought to be an anticlimax to the previous achievements made throughout the era of modernism. He states 'the modernistic movement comprises one of the most remarkable constellations of genius in the history of the West', while on the other hand, postmodernism has produced literature that 'shows little concern for the life of the mind, finding virtue instead in stupidity and the defence of ignorance.'⁸⁶ [Baudrillard and Lyotard, however regard postmodernism to be a part of modernism.] Such criticism indicates his position of believing in a clear divide between modernism and postmodernism.

Among other reasons, the postmodern conceptual framework has been attacked for its denunciation of realism in literature, and scepticism of scientific, positivist and empirical methods of research. Postmodernism does not seek to master perceptions of reality, as it considers 'the world' to be beyond any overarching, all encompassing explanation (beyond any definitive metanarrative). Postmodernism doubts the unified and consistent patterns of social interaction. As Sabina Lovibund writes, 'postmodernism rejects the doctrine of the unity of reason. It refuses to conceive of humanity as a unitary subject striving towards the goal of perfect coherence (in its common stock of beliefs) or of perfect cohesion and stability (in its political practice).'⁸⁷ It suggests that society's structures have dissolved and members of society, now have a floating

⁸⁵ Jonathon Culler, *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997, p. 51.

⁸⁶ Eysteinnsson, 1990, p. 105.

identity; one that changes according to the circumstances. Terry Eagleton's book *The Illusion of Postmodernism*⁸⁸ is one work, however, that aims to expose some of the false aspirations and misleading ideals that originate from postmodernism thought. With its weaknesses acknowledged, it is important to recognize that the power and influence of aspects of postmodern thought or art (literature) might be more pertinent in different contexts. In some cultures, possibly where postmodernism has yet to fully emerge, its faults and fallacies might not be as apparent as its strengths and ability to confront dominant modes of political and literary discourse.

Postmodernism's relativism and denouncement of positivist and empirical intellectual inquiry has inspired many critics. Terry Eagleton has denounced postmodernism from a Marxist perspective, while Ziauddin Sardar has strongly criticised the secular absolutism and the belief in the superficiality and nothingness of everything that postmodern thought seems to support. Sardar argues against postmodernism's 'colonialist bent' from an Islamic perspective.⁸⁹ The battle for and against postmodernism is engaging and broad, and this thesis hopes to go beyond the naïve and simplistic definition of how postmodern can be useful in contemporary Indonesian literature, while remaining fully aware of the destructiveness of an absolutist and nihilist postmodern view.

Postmodernism incorporates elements of previous styles into its various art forms. What is the purpose of this repetition? It shows the connection between different times and different eras. Postmodernism condenses chronology through artistic forms which combine forms of contrasting histories and locations. Locality is also 'condensed' – distance vanishes. Identity and national essences become confused when everything is available everywhere and the sources of social identity have become blurred or have moved. Postmodernism connects contemporary life and one's context to the past and to the foreign without first confronting any significant boundaries of form. Given that it seeks to show the interconnection between different times and spaces it is ironic that postmodernism has sometimes been seen as a distinctly new phenomenon. It is clearly of the modern. Modernists should remember that ease in viewing an artwork, familiarity with an art form is something new, as it rejects modernism's goal of newness. Thus postmodernism's use of past styles sits within the modernist canon, albeit ironically and at a certain self-reflexive distance.

Postmodernism's presence is elusive, problematic and questionable. To what extent does it confront modernism: is it merely a questioning of its aims and forms, or is it a total rejection of its reason for existing? Expressions of postmodernisms may range from the relatively 'conservative'

⁸⁷ Lovibund, in Woods, 1999, p. 9.

⁸⁸ Terry Eagleton, *The Illusion of Postmodernism*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996.

⁸⁹ Sohail Inayatullah and Gail Boxwell (eds), *Islam, Postmodernism and Other Futures: A Ziauddin Sardar Reader*, London: Pluto Press, 2003, p. 11.

to the extremely provocative. The degree of a postmodern writer's confrontation or dialogue with modernism is an essential task of the critic in determining the respective writer's postmodern-ness.

Similarly with poststructuralism and deconstruction, Faruk H.T. writes part of postmodernism's purpose lies in its ability to confront and dismantle previously accepted dichotomies.⁹⁰ Postmodernism has taught us to question the inter-relatedness between the objective-subjective, rational-irrational, East-West, male-female, high-low culture, and so on. All of these ideas rely on the construction of the meaning's opposite. That is, we can't have 'high culture' unless we have defined what 'low culture' is. Postmodernist architecture, art or literature explores the areas in between high and low culture. Postmodern writers produce works which are neither fully 'high' nor 'low' literature. Although holding many reservations about the ideological indeterminance of postmodernism, Ariel Heryanto has written that it 'can offer a profound challenge to the currently dominant apparatuses of the social sciences.'⁹¹ Michael Bodden writes, Heryanto 'equated Indonesian development (*pembangunan*) with that kind of modernism which believed in linear progress, absolute scientific truth, the efficacy of social engineering and the establishment of a formal system of knowledge and production.' According to Heryanto, the positive aspects of postmodernism in the Indonesian context, include the following alternatives:

'double entendre and youth slang (rather than formal language), diversity and complexity (not the sole basis), local (not universal), mixing (not stability and security)[...] anarchy (rather than hierarchy) [...] process (rather than goal), openness (rather than centralization), participation (not bureaucracy), play (not subservience to the rules) and so on.'^{92]}

The high-low (serious-popular) cultural divide is one example of a 'binary opposition' which is part of Western thinking. Catherine Belsey, in *Poststructuralism*, writes that Western thought is dependent on the maintenance of these binary oppositions, where one extreme is 'highly valued, the other found wanting' (e.g. high vs. low).⁹³ The 'highly valued' term is privileged over the subordinated opposite. The subordinated opposite is argued to be all that the high valued form is not, through a process of 'othering'. However, pivotal to this discussion, Belsey writes, is that 'these terms can never sustain the antithesis on which they depend and that the meaning of each depends on the trace of the other that inhabits its definition.'⁹⁴ Finding this to be evident is known as deconstruction. Jonathan Culler defines 'deconstruction' as 'a critique of the hierarchical oppositions that have structured Western thought...to deconstruct an opposition is to show that it

⁹⁰ Faruk, 2001, p. 25.

⁹¹ Ariel Heryanto, 'What does Post-modernism do in Indonesia?' *Sojourn*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (1995).

⁹² Bodden, in Foulcher and Day 2002, p. 300.

⁹³ Catherine Belsey, *Poststructuralism: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 75.

⁹⁴ Belsey, 2002, p. 75.

is not natural and inevitable but a construction, produced by discourses that rely on it.⁹⁵ Deconstructing the terms negates their 'objective' status. The aim of 'deconstruction' is to find the gray area, to find what exists between the two polarised categories. Deconstruction relies on the strategy that

'The idea of...a central referent does not hold; it has to be dismantled. There is no determinate meaning of a word, a text or a signifier, but meaning is always newly constructed. The effect of meaning is constituted only by its differences from innumerable alternative meanings, and so the specification of meaning becomes a never-ending process.'⁹⁶

Deconstruction should be a liberating experience, leading to the realisation of a new scope for artistic exploration.

This brief introduction has attempted to outline the main concepts associated with postmodern thought. These include relativism, scepticism (in theory) and self-reflexivity (in practice). It is recognized that just as postmodernism envisages a world without boundaries, literature that is identified as being 'postmodern' may continue to show evidence of modernist tendencies. Ironically though, postmodernism makes no claim to being a coherent set of aesthetic principles. It thus has prepared its own escape route for criticism of not providing a consistent aesthetic practice.

Postmodern Literature

It is possible to recognise postmodern fiction by applying a checklist of features to the text in question. Texts described as postmodern do not need to show traces of all of the features that predominate in descriptions of postmodern fiction. However, it is necessary to show in what ways a text has a postmodern dominant and what are the elements that contrast or conflict with the text's postmodern tendencies. A text may not need to be fully postmodern to critically apply postmodern ideas – this also might not be desirable. It is possible that gaps and divergences between various styles may enhance a text's richness or complexity. So, it may be most useful to discuss a text in terms of its postmodern-ness and to be aware of the range of postmodern devices that often appear as reflections of the postmodern condition.

A practical and clearly structured guide to postmodernism can be found in Tim Woods' *Beginning Postmodernism*.⁹⁷ Woods identifies eight dominant traits of postmodern literature. These features overlap to a certain extent and some may be considered as a subcategory others. Nonetheless,

⁹⁵ Culler, 1997, p. 122.

⁹⁶ Krassnitzer, 1995, p. 32.

Woods' formulation provides a useful starting point. Firstly, Woods writes that postmodern texts have a 'preoccupation with the viability of systems of representation'. That is, the texts show an inherent distrust of their ability to refer to the 'real' world. Second, a text's subject may be plural; the narrator is not a stable, reliable and invisible author. Third, the 'narrative...doubles back on its own presuppositions' – the texts indicate their own structural incoherence and absurdity. That is, a text may assert two mutually denying statements. Fourth, the narrative 'self-consciously alludes to its own artifice'. This is similar to the first point as both are concerned with the text's own textuality and its ability to have referential meaning beyond its form. Fifth, an 'interrogation of the ontological bases of the connections between narrative and subjectivity'. The final three cover dismantling the borders between high and popular culture, exploring ways narratives construct understandings of history and the 'displacement of the real by simulacra...[through using]...historical fictions as fact.'⁹⁸

Aleid Fokkema outlines three visions of postmodernism, those of McHale, Hutcheon and Waugh.⁹⁹ Each of them appoints various exemplary authors and novels (or short stories) to their canon of postmodern literature. Postmodern theory denounces the idea of 'a canon', but convenience in practical literary criticism and understanding overpowers the abstract goals of theory. Firstly, McHale argues that postmodern fiction is characterised by the 'ontological dominant'. That is, it 'problematizes the ontology of the literary text itself or...the ontology of the world it projects'.¹⁰⁰ Secondly, Waugh cites to the phenomena of metafiction. This is 'fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artifact in order to pose questions about the relation between fiction and reality.'¹⁰¹ Thirdly, Hutcheon describes its attributes of 'historiographic metafiction'. This is, 'they engage, problematically referential text that is offered as another of the discourses by which we construct our versions of reality.'¹⁰² One of the most well known works that plays with the re-telling of history, through its incorporation into narrative is John Fowles' *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. For example:

'So perhaps I am writing a transposed autobiography; perhaps I now live in one of the houses I have brought into the fiction; perhaps Charles is myself disguised. Perhaps it is only a game. Modern women like Sarah exist, and I have never understood them. Or perhaps I am trying to pass off a concealed book of essays on you.'¹⁰³

⁹⁷ Woods, 1999.

⁹⁸ Woods, 1999, p. 9.

⁹⁹ Aleid Fokkema, *Postmodern Characters: A Study of Characterization in British and American Postmodern Fiction*, Amsterdam, Rodopi, 1991, p. 14.

¹⁰⁰ Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction*, New York: Methuen, 1987, p. 10.

¹⁰¹ Patricia Waugh, *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction*, London: Methuen, 1984, p. 2.

¹⁰² Hutcheon, 1988, p. 52.

As Waugh and Hutcheon have written, there is 'an instability of the fictional world.'¹⁰⁴ This conflicts with the ideal of realism, where literary works present a different version of a historically possible world. Realist works depict a world that is logically possible. Realist works accept the validity of the relationship between empiricist conventions and scientific knowledge and reality. In denying these established thought processes, postmodern writers presented a 'confrontation between the text and the world of our own.'¹⁰⁵ Textual instability can be created by using a paranoid or confused narrator, or one without a reliable centre of consciousness. Figures from other works of fiction or history make appearances in realms beyond their usual existence. Don DeLillo, often cited as being central to the postmodern literary canon in the U.S., narrates the story of J. Edgar Hoover watching a famous early 1950s baseball game during the first chapter of his monumental work, *Underworld*.¹⁰⁶ While President Nixon appears in Robert Coover's novel *The Public Burning* (1977), where he seduces a fictional character. Another example is Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose*. Eco has written, 'books always speak of other books and every story tells a story that has already been told.' Butler, writes that this is an example of how 'texts are seen as perpetually referring to other ones rather than to any external reality.'¹⁰⁷ While Derrida sees it as merely an example of continual dissemination of variations on previously established concepts or ideas.¹⁰⁸

Intertextuality and the practice of 'books talking to books' is also common to both movements. It is postmodernism though that asserts the essentiality of this condition: books only talk to other books, they never really refer to the real world. There is a total disenchantment with the referential ability of language and any form of artistic expression.

Distinguishing the postmodern from the modern, is the former's refusal to 'play fair with the reader.'¹⁰⁹ Even in grandiose and complex modern literature, such as that by James Joyce, the accomplished reader could still construct a logical chronology and sets of cause and effect relationships. But, because it is postmodernity's 'meaning of existence', it refuses to follow paradigms that rest on the belief that the world can be logically recreated in a literary (or any other kind of) text. Butler has written that 'the postmodernist novel doesn't try to create a sustained realist illusion: it displays itself as open to all those illusory tricks of stereotype and

¹⁰³ Christopher Butler, *Postmodernism: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 71.

¹⁰⁴ Butler, 2002, p. 70.

¹⁰⁵ Butler, 2002, p. 70.

¹⁰⁶ Don de Lillo, *Underworld*, New York: Scribner, 1997.

¹⁰⁷ Butler, 2002, p. 32.

¹⁰⁸ Butler, 2002, p. 32.

¹⁰⁹ Butler 2002, p. 32.

narrative manipulation, and of multiple interpretation in all its contradiction and inconsistency, which are central to postmodernist thought.¹¹⁰

Postmodern texts do not attempt to understand the psychology of a character. Aleid Fokkema has written how this feature makes it possible for them to be described as 'flat' or 'cartoon like' because their inner conflicts and emotions are not specifically explored.¹¹¹ This is in part due to the postmodernist belief that an individual does not have a central core aspect of his or her identity that moderates his or her behavior. Postmodernists believe in the dominance of plural selves rather than a single personality. Lawrence E. Cahoone explains it as follows: 'the human self is not a simple unity, hierarchically composed, solid, self-controlled; rather it is a multiplicity of forces or elements. It would be more true to say that I have selves, than a *self*.'¹¹² This complements Catherine Belsey's idea that a human being is not an identity, a whole, but something that is in a process of continual transformation. As such, it is unsurprising that logical behavior is not demanded of characters in postmodernist literature. Christopher Butler describes this indifference to exploring a character's identity to be evident in the fiction of the 'new novelists' in France. He writes that they moved 'towards a far colder, contradiction-filled anti-narrative method in the texts of Alain Robbe-Grillet, Philippe Sollers, and others, who were not so much interested in individual character, or coherent narrative suspense and interest, as in the play of their own authorial language.'¹¹³

McHale's discussion on the search for the *dominant* in postmodern writing is useful because he describes an instance of crossing back and forth between modernism and postmodernism, using the example of Faulkner's *Absalom Absalom*. McHale's defined modernism as have an epistemological dominant (concerned with the theory of knowledge), while postmodernism was defined by an ontological dominant (concerned with the nature of being).¹¹⁴

Linda Hutcheon sees postmodernism as being resolutely contradictory, as it is complicit in its reproduction of cultural forms that it seeks to criticize. It is an ironic form of knowing – it says something as if with inverted commas around it. It adds to the flood of cultural discourse and production, while seeking to criticize the idealized position of the artist.¹¹⁵ Similar to avant-gardist movements of the 20th century, postmodernism seeks to de-naturalize our understanding of the

¹¹⁰ Butler, 2002, p. 73.

¹¹¹ A. Fokkema, 1991, p.15.

¹¹² Cahoone, 1996, p. 15.

¹¹³ Butler, 2002, p. 7.

¹¹⁴ Brian McHale, "Change of Dominant from Modernist to Postmodernist Writing" in Douwe Fokkema and Hans Bertens (ed), *Approaching Postmodernism: Papers Presented at a Workshop on Postmodernism, 21-23 September 1984, University of Utrecht*, Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1986. p. 58 and 60.

¹¹⁵ Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism*, London: Routledge, 1989, p. 34.

world. It is this process which makes it comparable to movements which have sought to re-establish the rights that have been subordinated by dominant ideologies, metanarratives. This de-doxification is the initial step in creating room for change. However, postmodern literary works typically refrain from straightforward social criticism. In *White Noise*, Don DeLillo maintains an ambiguous position towards the culture he is criticizing; there is no heavy-handed criticism of it.¹¹⁶ Cindy Sherman's photographs of herself based on Hollywood movie stills also provide an example of simultaneously installing and subverting dominant cultural practices. This act's significance depends on the artist's degree of self-awareness in doing so.

The relevance of parody and pastiche to postmodernism. Jameson's argument, was in Dentith's words, something like this: 'that the cultural logic of late capitalism was distinct from that of previous economic stages; that postmodernist cultural practice in a range of arts expressed this cultural logic; that this cultural practice was characterised above all by pastiche, which was to be distinguished from parody by the absence of any critical distance from the ur-text. Jameson's essay characterises 'consumer' or 'late capitalist' or 'post-industrial' society as a world without cultural hierarchies; a depthless world in which the recourse to nature, or the past, or 'high' culture, as ways of getting the measure of the world, has been abandoned. In such a situation, the critical force carried by parody has been replaced by pastiche, in which artists, architects and writers can endlessly allude to other styles in an interminable recycling which mirrors the unending commodity circulation of absolutely extensive capitalism.'¹¹⁷

Conclusions

Despite inevitable exclusions it is necessary to provide a basic conclusion of what I consider to be the dominant features of postmodern literary practice. These features may be applied across the arts to varying degrees. Pastiche is connected also to irony and the acceptance of creative exhaustion in the arts. In postmodernism repetition is inevitable so the metanarrative of complete originality is considered to be flawed. Process is prioritized over the object; questioning and referring to the process in which an artwork is created becomes the central feature of the 'artistic' object. Artists have challenged the rigidity of boundaries born out of modernism through diversification and unexpected combinations.

Postmodernism, like other literary genres, movements or theories is extremely difficult to define and only a few of the main points of disagreement or contention have been outlined in this discussion. However, for the sake of a practical and constructive thesis, a definition must be formulated, keeping in mind that attempts at essentialising or limiting the definition of

¹¹⁶ Woods, 1999, p 68.

¹¹⁷ Simon Dentith, *Parody*, London: Routledge, 2000, p. 155.

postmodernism is antithetical to its *raison d'être*. As such, by its very premise, this thesis is decidedly non-postmodernist. I will use the term to refer to a theoretical (intellectual?), artistic and literary movement that rose to prominence in the second half of the 20th century, which engaged in the problematising of the text (medium), characterisation, originality and the instability of the text. My definition, in part, neglects the achievements or developments made by peripheral or non-Western cultures. The discourse that has formed the basis for the definition is primarily Western (American and British).

Indonesian writers and Seno Gumira Ajidarma in particular have also developed their own significant uses for ideas originally espoused by other postmodernist authors: their application has been both innovative and a creative response to their surrounding conditions. It is indeed, no way second rate, because of apparent predecessors elsewhere. 'Logical' also, in that part of the postmodernist theories appear particularly relevant or helpful to understanding Indonesian culture, and its literature, in particular. Postmodernism is not in Indonesia as something merely foreign, it has been appropriated to become identifiably Indonesian.

Some critics have argued that a key feature of modernity is its self-reflexiveness. Eysteinsson also identifies this similarity between texts described as 'modern' and 'postmodern'. In this sense there is a clear continuation between the two movements. However, critics have referred to postmodernism's intensification of this practice. The difference lies in the degree of the practice rather than the introduction of any fundamentally new idea. Postmodernism's intensification of aspects of modernism have been read as an opposition to modernism. That may be too dramatic a conclusion.

Should postmodernism be considered the climax or anti-climax of modernism? Is its modernism's demise or its final culmination? The answer is probably somewhere in between. To find an effective and productive postmodernism, it must be one that does not reject out of hand the systems of thought that apply ideas of positivist knowledge, leading to an endless decline into a relativist swamp, incapable of reaching any tangible position. It is equally useless to deny that the postmodern moment has occurred: ideas of postmodernism have had broad and thorough influences in many different fields of intellectual and artistic endeavour. Neither a hasty retreat to the comforts of modernism nor a blind enthusiasm for the trendy radical aims of an overpowering postmodernism will provide satisfying and enduring answers to questions of aesthetic practice. Postmodernism's representing of the marginalized and its disturbing of elitist modernist practices do increase our knowledge of ways of being and help us to comprehend the human condition in broader, more representative terms.

Although postmodernism should be considered a continuation of modernism, it is still possible to construct new dichotomies which are indicative of each style's aesthetics. This table is a summary of the ideas I associate with the two styles. Indeed, it is very abstract, however keeping these notions in my mind may be useful in detecting works that have a postmodern aura to them.

Modernism	Postmodernism
Positivism	Scepticism
Optimism	Pessimism
Style	Kitsch
Progress	Running on the spot
Meaning	Emptiness
The relation of the text to the world is intact	'nothing is beyond the text' (texts are incapable of referring to the world)
Space and time are clearly demarcated and separated	Space and time are one and united; we live in plural times and plural spaces
Purposeful	Futile
Logical	Irrational
Consistent	Flippant
Satisfying	Frustrating
Universal	Particular
Novel	Repetitive
Original	Fake
Pure	Polluted
Belief	Nihilism

This chapter has sought to briefly define the distinguishing features of modernism, postmodernism and postmodernist literature. From my reading of Ajidarma's literature I have isolated recurring uses of textual instability, multiple and shifting selves, a distrust towards metanarratives and an engagement with popular culture. It is these four aspects of postmodernism that I will use as the basis for my discussion of Seno's fiction. But first, I will introduce the social and political context of New Order Indonesia, which will allow for a better understanding of the innovations of Seno's fiction.

Chapter Two

Cultural Politics of the New Order

A myriad of works have already dealt with the cultural and political conditions of the New Order era. As such, the purpose of this section is only to provide the context for Seno's work. This chapter outlines the dominant conditions that influenced social and cultural expression.

The New Order (NO) was the name given to the Indonesian government, which ruled from 1966 until 1998. Suharto came to power after the aborted communist coup of 1965 and led the NO until political and economic turmoil and widespread protests forced him to step down in May 1998. Krishna Sen and David Hill have described the NO as, 'the authoritarian form of government through which Indonesia was ruled since 1966.'¹¹⁸ During this era, Suharto sought to establish a stable social and political environment that would be conducive for economic development (*pembangunan*).¹¹⁹ The ideal of national development was used to justify and to maintain its legitimacy. Ariel Heryanto, has identified five main factors with which it did this: i) nationalism; ii) Pancasila; iii) the 1945 Constitution and its 'formal embodiment'; iv) development programmes and v) propaganda on stability and order.¹²⁰ Heryanto asserts that it 'development' was the most vital and least susceptible to serious challenge during the NO. The fifth aspect (propaganda on stability and order) was the most open to direct criticism¹²¹.

The second aspect, Pancasila (The Five Principles) is Indonesia's state philosophy. According to Adam Schwarz these principles have been a 'forceful binding agent for a young nation and a powerful tool of repression.'¹²² To question the validity of the Indonesian nation state was a most serious crime. The NO's claims of the immutability of Indonesia's national sovereignty is evident through its actions which have sought to annihilate separatist movements. Organisations such as GAM (*Gerakan Aceh Merdeka*, Free Aceh Movement) and Fretilin (East Timorese pro-independence movement, in the past) represent antitheses to NO rhetoric of national unity. Heryanto asserts that Pancasila significance has two parts. First 'it functions as the ideological basis for the NO's primary claim to have saved the nation from the so-called 1965 communist coup' and 'in later years it has been used to undercut perceived Islamic-based opposition.'¹²³

¹¹⁸ Krishna Sen and David Hill, *Media, Culture and Politics in Indonesia*, 2002 p. 2

¹¹⁹ Or as Hendrik M.J. Maier, calls it 'construction'.

¹²⁰ Ariel Heryanto, "State Ideology and Civil Discourse" in Arief Budiman (ed), *State and Civil Society*, Clayton: Centre of Southeast Asian Studies, Monash University, 1990, p. 290.

¹²¹ Heryanto, 1990, p. 290.

¹²² Adam Schwarz, *A Nation in Waiting*, St. Leonards: Allen and Unwin, 1994, p. 10.

¹²³ Heryanto, 1990, p. 291.

Critics of the NO were dismissed by the NO as being anti-Pancasila, anti-45 Constitution or as representing a threat to national stability and order.

Throughout the NO regime, the government was able to steadily increase its authority while diminishing the prospects for sustained and effective criticism against it. Depoliticisation of society was central to establishing a conducive climate for economic development.¹²⁴ Nationalism and Pancasila, mentioned above were just two of the main factors that were used by the NO to discredit opposition to its policies. Essential to the three other factors indicated by Heryanto, was the state's efforts in gaining control of the press, the de-politicization of universities and the politically restricted ability for artists and writers to express social criticisms through their work. Heryanto considers it as follows: legitimization involves extensive military participation in social activities, intimidation, extensive and rigorous surveillance, retarded mechanisms of rule of law, overt extra judicial operations and the tight control of the press and educational institutions.¹²⁵

'Development', as mentioned earlier, was central to the NO's ideology. As a result of the *pembangunan* successes, an urban middle class was formed who had disposable income and time for consuming cultural products. However, as Matheson-Hooker points out, a side effect of development, was destruction.¹²⁶ Thus *pembangunan* had a paradoxical relationship with Indonesian culture. The destruction of the *pembangunan* ideology, was evident in environmental, cultural, social and political terms. Ideological conformity in the name of development eradicated political opposition and restricted the growth of art forms that presented alternative ideals to those of the NO.

The 32 years of NO governance was marked by serious restrictions on the expression of criticism of political figures and the social conditions in Indonesia. The NO's ideal of *pembangunan*, and Pancasila were directly related to the press policies while Suharto was in power. It was believed that economic development could only be achieved in a calm national climate, free of major confrontations between different communal groups. Being a nation of diverse religious, cultural and ethnic groups, the NO attempted to ensure that no single group would promote their own interest over that of the nation's. National identity and state integrity was prioritized over the needs and rights of ethnic and religious minorities. To prevent the proliferation of public political discussion, in which certain ethnic or religious groups would vie for political advantage, the NO

¹²⁴ Faruk, *Pengantar Sosiologi Sastra: Dari Strukturalisme Genetik sampai Post-Modernisme*, Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 1994.

¹²⁵ Heryanto, 1990, p. 291.

¹²⁶ Virginia Matheson-Hooker, *Culture and Society in New Order Indonesia*, Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1993, p. 14.

adopted a policy towards the press that banned the discussion of 'SARA' issues. To support national development, issues relating to ethnicity (*şuku*), religion (*agama*), race (*ras*) and class (*antar golongan*) were excluded from national discourse.

SARA, however was a general list of what should not be reported within the Indonesian media. As a complement to this, the NO government also had in its power the ability to close down any publication that transgressed guidelines of what should not be discussed. This was done through the withdrawal of a publishing company's publishing license. The SIUPP could be withdrawn at any time. Harmoko, head of the Ministry of Information throughout the later years of the NO explains: 'publications which don't reflect the values of Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution and instead propound different views, including liberalism, radicalism and communism are prohibited. In practice, that means their SIUPP will be cancelled, a step which is allowed by law.'¹²⁷ The exact limitations of what might trigger were never stated by the NO government. The vagueness of the limitations worked in the government's favour, as journalists and editors were encouraged to practice 'self-censorship.' The press was encouraged to be 'free but responsible'.¹²⁸ A truly 'free press' was considered an inappropriate Western import, and thus the press was coerced into supporting the government's aims of development.

So, what were the dominant modes of cultural expression throughout the NO? Did writers present opposition to the authoritarian government, or were they involved in literary forms that separated them from political struggle?

Hatley¹²⁹, Foulcher¹³⁰ and Clark¹³¹ have all written that there were two main trends in cultural production during the NO. The first was one of aesthetic experimentation, non-realistic and absurd writing, a concentration on philosophical and metaphysical themes. Foulcher has written how the developments made in the anti-realist works of Danarto evolved from being subversive into a new kind of orthodoxy.¹³² Secondly, there were increasing references to indigenous and regional cultural traditions.¹³³ In the works of writers such as Y.B.Mangunwijaya and Emha Ainun Nadjib, Clark, argues that these writers attempted to 'outwit the authorities' through social commentary conveyed through references to Java's 'pre-eminent cultural expression, the

¹²⁷ Schwarz, 1994, p. 241.

¹²⁸ Schwarz, 1994, p. 241.

¹²⁹ Barbara Hatley, 'Cultural Expression' in Hal Hill (ed) *Indonesia's New Order*, St. Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1994.

¹³⁰ Keith Foulcher, "Post-modernism or the Question of History: Some Trends in Indonesian Fiction since 1965" in Virginia Matheson-Hooker (ed), *Culture and Society in New Order Indonesia*, Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1993.

¹³¹ Marshall Clark, "Shadow Boxing: Indonesian Writers and the Ramayana in the New Order" in *Indonesia* 72, October, 2001.

¹³² Foulcher, in Matheson-Hooker (ed), 1993, p. 35.

wayang.¹³⁴ The anti-realist fiction developed distinctive Indonesian features, and even though it opposed aspects of the social and political realities of the era, it was also a deeper engagement with those very issues it criticised.¹³⁵

Significant writers during this period include, Putu Wijaya, W.S. Rendra, Goenawan Mohamad, Sutardji Calzoum Bachri, Danarto, Nh. Dini and Leila S. Chudori. Putu Wijaya pioneered the development of anti-realist expression in his short stories and plays. He has also been a part of the postmodern exploration of 'examining the construction of form, of meaning, and of reality itself.'¹³⁶ Danarto also used conventions of surrealism in his suffistic short stories.¹³⁷ Keith Foulcher recognises the experiments in form made by the anti-realists in the New Order. He refers to Danarto's story *Rintrik*, as a 'variety of the fantastic, outside the "world which we inhabit from day to day", but the story itself is laden with conflict of rival world-views and the social and political practices which flow from them.'¹³⁸ Sutardji Calzoum Bachri became famous for his credo that the goal of literature was to free words from meaning.

Hendrik Maier, a leading critic of Indonesian literature has commented negatively on much of the NO literature. Maier argues that the surrealist literature which dominated the Suharto era was too similar to what was acceptable to the ideologues of the New Order hierarchies and only cites Wiji Thukul as a substantial oppositional author.¹³⁹ Maier argues that NO writers had not produced works that presented alternatives to the dominant ideologies. This reflects the view of seeing absurd literature as a rejection of social responsibility.¹⁴⁰ Maier compares the socially critical impotency of the surrealists against the achievements (and unjust sufferings) of Indonesia's pre-eminent modern writer, Pramoedya Ananta Toer. He laments that Pramoedya's *Buru Quartet* novels 'arrived too late' in the Indonesian literary scene. And that, instead of a 'literature of great and densely constructed novels that would deal with love, life, and death in a deeply philosophical way', what existed was 'sastra pop [popular literature], short stories, and poetry readings' that were 'in close correspondence with the wishes of the ideologists of the New Order.'¹⁴¹ Other

¹³³ Hatley, in Hill, 1994., p. 222.

¹³⁴ Clark, 2001, p. 165.

¹³⁵ Clark, 1999, p. 38.

¹³⁶ Foulcher, in Matheson-Hooker (ed), 1993, p. 37.

¹³⁷ Harry Aveling, *Rumah Sastra Indonesia*, Magelang: Indonesiatara, 2002.

¹³⁸ Foulcher, in Matheson-Hooker (ed), 1993, p. 31.

¹³⁹ Hendrik M.J. Maier, "Flying a Kite: The Crimes of Pramoedya Ananta Toer", in Vicente L. Rafael (ed), *Figures of Criminality in Indonesia, the Philippines, and Colonial Vietnam*, Ithaca: Southeast Asia Program Publications, 1999, p. 257.

¹⁴⁰ Foulcher in Matheson-Hooker (ed), 1993, p. 35.

¹⁴¹ Maier, 1999, p. 253.

critics, such as Harry Aveling, consider the literature produced during the New Order as having a 'great diversity and richness', despite the oppressive conditions.¹⁴²

The NO's influence over the legal systems in Indonesia, allowed for censorship of works such as *Nyanyi Sunyi Seorang Bisu* (The Mute's Soliloquy) and the *Buru Quartet*. Suharto's rule was marked by the implementation of the law based on the government's will, rather than any steadfast, consistent application of the 'rule of law'. As in the case of the press, publishing houses were also hounded by mysterious telephone calls, warning publishers of the ramifications if certain texts were published. Maier describes the circumstances as follows: 'in modern Indonesia, reading a *literary* book can still be an act of resistance, selling *literature* can still land someone in prison.'¹⁴³ Fiction was considered to have the power to cause public disorder and misunderstandings of Indonesian history. Literary works were banned, as the government feared they would be misinterpreted: the government believed that not everyone had the abilities to interpret the fictions correctly. This is an indication of the government's willingness to only validate *one truth, one perspective* on reality. Clark writes that Maier's conclusions on literature written during the NO era are too negative. Instead, Clark asserts that writers such as Putu Wijaya, Danarto and Seno 'were in their own oblique way just as oppositional and political as their realist counterpart, Pramoedya.'¹⁴⁴

Through negating the oppositional strengths of the media and the arts, the NO created an authoritarian-like atmosphere. Writers were not able to freely or openly criticise the legitimacy of state ideologies for fear of being censored. The notions of 'development' and national unity were prioritised over the importance of mass human rights abuses. The atmosphere was exclusive of ideologies that challenged the NO's efforts at developing and maintaining an 'Indonesian national personality'. How Seno used postmodernism to question the concepts and ideologies which were part of the New Order will be explored in the next chapter.

¹⁴² Ian Campbell, "Some developments in Indonesian literature since 1998", in *Review of Indonesian and Malaysian Affairs*, Vol. 36, number 2, 2002, p. 35.

¹⁴³ Maier, 1999, p. 248.

¹⁴⁴ Clark, 2001, p. 165.

Chapter Three

Seno Gumira Ajidarma

3.1 Micronarratives

Micronarratives in the Indonesian Context

The fall of the New Order has led to the increased questioning of the many grand narratives associated with its ideologies.¹⁴⁵ Since 1998 new freedoms have emerged about what can be discussed in public discourse. This section looks at some of Seno's works which have represented the narratives of the dispossessed and the unrepresented parts of Indonesian society – many of which did not conform with the New Order's aims of economic development and national unity and representing their plight has challenged the New Order authority on national 'construction'. This section shows the breadth of Seno's dealing with micronarratives and as such argues for their recognition as a significant part of his literature. Their presence is part of my assertion that various examples of Seno's work can be qualified as 'postmodern'. The works discussed were written during the New Order or afterwards but are works which counter New Order ideologies.

There are many sources of micronarratives: ideology, ethnic identity, geography, class or religion. These aspects may be combined to different degrees in each narrative. The interplay of ethnic identity, ideology, class or religion strengthen the 'other-ness' of a minority group. Seno's stories dealing with the rapes of Chinese Indonesians, for example are micronarratives based on ethnic identity. As these rapes largely occurred in Jakarta they are not micronarratives because of their geographical location. The perspective of an Indonesian communist is a micronarrative of ideology – however, transferred to the People's Republic of China, a similar perspective would be part of the dominant web of grand narratives. In this sense, what is a micronarrative or grand narrative is subjective as it relies on context rather than as being something universal. Put simply, they are the stories of ideological, geographical, ethnic or class minorities, and those who are on society's peripheries.

¹⁴⁵ Razif Bahari writes that a feature of 'postmodern times' is that 'the comfort and stability of meta-narrative of any kind is slipping away, while national boundaries are increasingly becoming porous', in "A postcolonial aperçu: reconceptualising Indonesian history, nation and identity in Pramoedya Ananta Toer's *Buru tetrology*", in *Review of Indonesian and Malaysian Affairs*, volume 36, number 2, 2002, p. 19.

Stories from the Periphery

Seno has written about provinces on the periphery of Indonesian national culture. One is East Timor, which gained independence in 1999, another is Aceh. In stories about the cultural and political 'centre', Seno has written about those who have not benefited from Indonesia's economic development. Or in the case of the narrator in *Jazz, Parfum dan Insiden*, a young office worker, who sits in a high-rise office and is unable to escape from feelings of complicity in the violence inflicted upon East Timorese. The general ignorance of the violence inspires a deep guilt within the narrator which forces him to pursue more information about East Timor. The narrator's reading of reports about the violence becomes like a drug to him and he struggles to reconcile his emotional response with the indifference of the world around him.

The collection of stories in *Saksi Mata* and the short story, *Telpon Dari Aceh* are examples of where Seno has written about human rights abuses in provinces far from Jakarta. While in terms of ideological micronarratives, he has dealt with the backlash against suspected communists during 1966-67. These works are (the play) *Mengapa kau culik anak kami?*¹⁴⁶ and (a recent short story) *Rembulan dalam Capuccino*.¹⁴⁷ In these examples, Seno presents the suffering of the victims caused by the murders of suspected communists. He provides an alternative to the dominant narrative by emphasising the cruelty of the mass murders, rather than the alleged sadism of the communists. Michael Bodden has also written of the connection between Indonesian postmodernism and its connection to social criticism. With particularly relevance to the works discussed below, Bodden has observed that:

'the work of the Indonesian postmodernists...was produced in a general climate of growing popular opposition to the New Order. In this way, the postmodern "universalism" of these cultural workers grew out of the Euro-American genealogy of nationalism with its emphasis on inalienable rights that extend to all, creating a community of equals before the law.'¹⁴⁸

Seno was targeted by New Order authorities as a result of his allegiance with the East Timorese. His targeting by the military was a result of his writing, rather than any pre-determined association with the East Timorese or Acehnese. It was a result of his choice to expose their suffering. Marshall Clark has written, 'Seno's second work of fiction portraying the tragedy of East Timor (*Jazz, Parfum dan Insiden*)...was also a reflection of his strong commitment to revealing not only the tragedy of Indonesia's invasion and annexation of East Timor but also the decaying social and political underside of Suharto's New Order regime.'¹⁴⁹ Seno's stories assert the need for protection of human rights and attempted to move away from a discourse which only saw East

¹⁴⁶ Seno Gumira Ajidarma, *Mengapa Kau Culik Anak Kami?* Yogyakarta: Galang Press, 2001.

¹⁴⁷ Seno Gumira Ajidarma, "Rembulan Dalam Cappucino" in *Kompas*, 30.11.03

¹⁴⁸ Bodden in Foulcher and Day, 2002, p. 294.

Timorese narratives as being opposed to the Indonesian nation state. He connects the suffering of the East Timorese to broader issues of 'equal rights, individual identity and freedom.'¹⁵⁰ *Saksi Mata, Jazz, Parfum dan Insiden* and *Telpon dari Aceh*, aim to be neutral, beyond their assertion of human rights. The stories emphasize the suffering caused by the Indonesian Military's suppression of independence movements in the name of preserving Indonesian national unity. For Seno, the legitimacy of the East Timorese narrative lies in their human rights abuses rather than notions of cultural and national independence.

Clara and the Portrayal of Ethnic Chinese

Seno has written numerous short stories on the political crisis of 1997 and 1998. These stories deal with ethnic identity (*Clara, Eksodus*), mass rapes (*Clara, Jakarta 2039*) and mob violence (*Jakarta, Suatu Ketika*). He addresses the issue of Chinese ethnic identity by using the politically charged violence of 1998 as a starting point. These works merge two of his main themes: violence and social engagement. This section focuses on the short story, *Clara (Atawa Wanita yang diperkosa)*.¹⁵¹ This story has been chosen because of its dealing with the politically sensitive issue of the hitherto unsolved cases of the mass rapes that took place in Jakarta during the social upheaval preceding Suharto's resignation, and because it problematizes the complicity of the police in silencing the victims' narratives.

To appropriately position *Clara* in Seno's output, we must understand the position of the ethnic Chinese in New Order Indonesia. Suharto's government actively subordinated Chinese culture and separated them from the notion of the 'Indonesian personality.' They could not openly express their cultural and ethnic identity. Other minority ethnic groups suffered a similar problem throughout the archipelago. However, Chinese businesses were closely connected to New Order economic interests.¹⁵² Ethnic Chinese were considered to be uniformly rich, corrupt and to be of doubtful loyalty to the Indonesian nation. They were also considered ideologically suspicious because of their presumed connection to communism. Ethnic Chinese were in a paradoxical position in New Order Indonesia, as many played a vital role in economic progress, while they could also be positioned as a scapegoat in times of crisis. The case of the May riots is particularly relevant as Chinese homes and businesses were targeted, as were many ethnic Chinese themselves.

¹⁴⁹ Marshall Clark, "Seno Gumira Ajidarma: An Indonesian Imagining East Timor", *Review of Indonesian and Malaysian Affairs*, 33,2, 1999, p. 34

¹⁵⁰ Bodden in Foulcher and Day, 2002, p. 318.

¹⁵¹ Clara (or the woman who was Raped)

¹⁵² Adam Schwarz, *A Nation in Waiting*, St. Leonards: Allen and Unwin, 1994, p. 108.

Throughout the New Order, Chinese culture was not given room to develop freely: Mandarin was banned and ethnic Chinese were encouraged into adopting Indonesian sounding names or converting to Islam.¹⁵³ Through such processes, assimilation into the 'Indonesian' culture was possible. Conversion and new personal names, would make an ethnic Chinese Indonesian accord with, what Ariel Heryanto calls, the Indonesian 'national personality.'¹⁵⁴ New terms were used, which at the same time referred to and obscured their presence. These terms include, '*orang keturunan*' (literally, 'people of descent') and '*warga negara Indonesia*' (simply, Indonesian citizens). The press and politicians were forbidden to discuss matters concerning ethnicity, class, religion and race, with 'race' implicitly understood to mean Chinese.¹⁵⁵ Apart from being partners in economic development, being a Chinese Indonesian was discordant with the national identity.

Paul Tickell in 'After the Dictatorship' and Pam Allen, in 'Contemporary Literature from the Chinese Diaspora in Indonesia', have both discussed the way ethnic Chinese and Chinese identity have been portrayed in fiction after the fall of President Suharto. Tickell uses stories by Veven Wardhana as an example and argues that the previous stereotypes of Chinese have been replaced by new and similarly essentialising ideas.¹⁵⁶ The purpose of Allen's paper is to provide a review of the recent developments in Indonesian literature that deal with three aspects of Chineseness: 1) fiction by ethnic Chinese, 2) fiction that deals with the *masalah Cina* (the Chinese problem) and 3) fiction that addresses the *tragedi Mei 1998*.¹⁵⁷ Both essays provide a significant starting point for a new discussion of representations of ethnic Chinese in contemporary fiction. These essays map the emergence of new writing and link it to the contestation of ideas which shape identity. I regard these fictions as being a part of the general condition of postmodernity.

Clara tells the story of a victim of the mass rapes that occurred in the week leading up to President Suharto's resignation in May 1998. The rapes of up to 168 women were committed during the widespread looting on the 13-14th May.¹⁵⁸ The title alone indicates a new brazenness in addressing politically sensitive issues: writers are free to tell it as it is; metaphors and abstract symbolism are not needed to disguise overt social criticism. The story, which is a conversation between the victim and an unnamed policeman, addresses problems that were later to emerge in the attempts to resolve the crimes, including disbelief towards the confessions and the victims' fear of reporting the rapes. At one stage, the policeman, says, 'I can't *just* believe her - I have to

¹⁵³ Pam Allen, "Contemporary Literature from the Chinese 'Diaspora' in Indonesia", in *Asian Ethnicity*, Volume 4, Number 3, October 2003, pp 383-399.

¹⁵⁴ Heryanto, 1998, p. 103.

¹⁵⁵ Paul Tickell, *After the Dictatorship*, paper presented at Monash University, 1.5.03

¹⁵⁶ Tickell, 2003, p. 4.

¹⁵⁷ Allen, 2003, p. 383.

¹⁵⁸ Allen, 2003, p. 397.

be suspicious. I must think of other possibilities, corner her, provoke her and make her tired so she quickly says what she *really* means.’¹⁵⁹ The story concludes without resolving Clara’s fate.

After being stopped by a mob on a Jakartan toll road while returning to her family’s home, Clara says, ‘Is it true these people hate Chinese that much? Sure I am Chinese, but what have I done wrong by being born Chinese? “I’m Indonesian”, I said while trembling.’¹⁶⁰ Her claim to being Indonesian is rejected by one of her rapists, ‘No way! Indonesians don’t have squinty eyes like yours!’¹⁶¹ The (clichéd) racism of the native (*pribumi*) Indonesian is contrasted with that of Clara’s efforts to make sure her father does not fire his workers, who are presumably native Indonesian. Clara’s indifference to race, is evident after been questioned about her boyfriend’s photograph in her wallet, in that she says, ‘I’ve never cared whether he is Javanese or Chinese. I only care about love.’¹⁶²

Seno breaks the stereotype of ethnic Chinese as ignoring the needs of native Indonesians by portraying Clara as someone who considers the needs of the *pribumi* employees who work for her father’s company. This is one aspect of Seno’s sympathetic portrayal of Clara. However, as is the stereotype of ethnic Chinese, Clara is rich and her father encourages her to leave Indonesia – possibly as a sign of his ‘superficial loyalty’ to Indonesia.¹⁶³ Despite being (a typical) ‘rich Chinese’, Clara is assimilating to being a *true Indonesian*: she feels Indonesian, she has a Javanese boyfriend and she has tried to prevent the *pribumi* workers from being fired. On the other hand, the policeman is an exemplar of corruption and mendacity. The urban *pribumi* poor are guilty of the rape of Clara and there is no implication of police involvement in organising the rapes. An old woman who appears near the story’s conclusion asks forgiveness for the behaviour of ‘*anak kami*’ (our children). This statement is suggestive of the collective guilt experienced after such indiscriminate and brutal violence.

The strength of *Clara*, lies in its breaking of the taboo on the rapes that occurred during May 1998. Clara does conform to some of the stereotypes commonly held of ethnic Chinese. However, it is atypical of Seno’s work to create such polarised and clear cut examples of ‘innocent’ and ‘guilty’ characters. The strength of his more insightful works lie in their ability to show up the falsity of supposedly clear definitions of binary oppositions. It is unlikely that all of the rape victims were rich and had Javanese boyfriends. Thus, Seno has been sympathetic towards the portrayal of an ethnic Chinese, in part at the expense of the urban poor, who in this

¹⁵⁹ Ajidarma, 1999, p. 74.

¹⁶⁰ Ajidarma, 1999, p. 72.

¹⁶¹ Ajidarma, 1999, 72.

¹⁶² Ajidarma, 1999, p.74.

representation, acted without coercion from the military or police. Part of the subversive aspects in this story most lies in the characterisation of the policeman: a man who has the ability to manipulate what he knows into suiting his ideological interests. Seno also shows up the problems of representing the narratives of others', and thus is a critique on representation.

The *Petrus*¹⁶⁴ Killings and their Narratives

I will now turn to a different type of micronarrative. The previous section was based on micronarratives determined by ethnic identity and the connotations of religion and political ideology that went with it. This section concerns micronarratives of class, in particular, a supposedly identifiable class of petty criminals (*preman* or *gali*). Like the ethnic Chinese and the East Timorese mentioned above, the type of criminal in the discussion below were not granted the guarantee of basic human rights. As with the perspectives of ethnic Chinese, alleged communists or Acehnese separatists, narratives which expose the suffering and experiences of those deemed by New Order officials as dispensable present the underside of Indonesian society during the New Order regime. In contrast to other narratives mentioned above, the *petrus* campaign itself was relatively short lived. However, if the *petrus* campaign is seen in the broader context of how the New Order state legitimised violence through state ideology, it cannot be considered a one off or a short lived policy. It is for this reason that an understanding of Seno's *petrus* stories is important in considering his work as a whole.

Graphic descriptions of violence appear in many of Seno's fictions. The violence is at times limited to disputes between lovers (as in *Matinya Seorang Penari Telanjang*) while on other occasions it is surreal (*Negeri Senja*), mystical (*Wisanggeni*, *Sang Buronan*), related to traditional martial arts (*Penari Dari Kutai*), entertaining and inspired by comics (*Kematian Donny Osmond*) or random and politically charged (*Jakarta 2039*, *Jakarta: Suatu Ketika*). Some of Seno's early poems, written under the name Mira Sato, also contain macabre themes. For example *Dua Gadis Cilik*¹⁶⁵ or the collection *Mati, Mati, Mati*¹⁶⁶. Political violence is clearly at the forefront of Seno's concerns as it has served as a theme throughout many of his short stories, plays or editorials. Part of my assertion is that despite the prominence that the *Saksi Mata* stories have had in understanding Seno's work, the *petrus* stories were the first examples of an engagement with this topic which has sustained Seno's interest until some of his most recent short stories.

¹⁶³ At the beginning of the story Clara is contacted by her father who tells her to leave the country as soon as possible because it is too dangerous for her to stay. Ajidarma, 1999, p. 70.

¹⁶⁴ Abbreviation for both *penembak misterius*, 'mysterious sniper' and *penembakan misterius*, 'mysterious shootings.'

¹⁶⁵ Mira Sato (a name Seno used until 1981), *Bayi Mati*, Jakarta: Kesembilan Belas Puisi Indonesia, 1978, p. 30.

¹⁶⁶ Mira Sato, *Mati, Mati, Mati*, 1975.

Petrus

Joshua Baker traces the *petrus* back to Yogyakarta where, in 1983 a senior policeman started a campaign of extra-judicial killings of suspected criminals. The killings were called 'mysterious' because the murderers were never brought to justice. However, the police and army were believed to be behind the killings. The murders were also 'mysterious' as many of the victims were thought to have magical powers: members of the armed forces believed that they could only be killed if they were decapitated or if they were shot while their feet were not touching the ground.¹⁶⁷ The murders were associated with a special type of killing – the way they were killed as sadistic due to the perceived mystical powers of the criminals. The campaign was a response to the crime wave that was spreading throughout many large Indonesian cities during the early 1980s. This campaign was also taken up in Jakarta, Surabaya, Solo Medan and Salatiga.¹⁶⁸ One of Suharto's biographers, Robert Elson describes *petrus* as 'a long-running series of murders of alleged criminal underworld figures and ex-convicts in the early and mid-1980s.'¹⁶⁹ Initially ABRI¹⁷⁰ did not publicly accept responsibility for the murders. For example Benny Murdani (then head of ABRI) claimed that the murders were a result of fighting between underworld gangs. However, Suharto's autobiography of 1989 was his first public acknowledgement of the state's involvement in the murders. Suharto explained the *petrus* campaign as,

'We had to use force. But this did not mean that we just shot them, bang, bang, just like that. No! Those who resisted, yes, they had to be shot willy-nilly. Because they resisted they were shot. Some of the bodies were just left there. This was for shock therapy so that people would understand that criminal actions would still be combated and overcome.'¹⁷¹

Police in major cities issued ultimatums to criminals warning them to hand themselves in.¹⁷² Rumors spread that immutable lists were made up of criminals. As many of the bodies that were found in public places were tattooed, it was believed that being tattooed was incriminating, and made one susceptible to becoming a victim of the *petrus* killings. Baker has written that this belief led to large numbers of men to remove their tattoos with caustic soda.¹⁷³ Throughout the campaign bodies were dumped in different cities from which the victims had come from. Baker sees the *petrus* campaign as one of the New Order's attempts to establish security throughout Indonesia. Other efforts included, suppressing separatist movements in Aceh and East Timor,

¹⁶⁷ Joshua Baker, 'Petrus: A New Criminal Type' in Benedict Anderson, *Violence and the state in Suharto's Indonesia*, Ithaca: Southeast Asia Program Publications, Cornell University, 2001.

¹⁶⁸ Prof. Arief Budiman tells of the experience of seeing dead bodies on the side of the road in Salatiga. Members of the army who initially visited him to warn him against his anti-*petrus* stance, also revealed to him about their own participation in the *petrus* killings. One asked him, 'is it a sin if I kill somebody, just because I'm following orders?'

¹⁶⁹ Robert Elson, *Suharto: A Political Biography*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 236.

¹⁷⁰ Angkatan Bersenjata Republik Indonesia, The Armed Forces of Indonesia

¹⁷¹ Elson, 2001, p. 237.

¹⁷² John Pemberton, *On the Subject of Java*, Ithaca: Cornell University, 1994, p. 311.

¹⁷³ Elson, 2001, p. 237.

limiting political activism and restricting press freedom. He has compared the killings to Suharto's attempts at cleaning up urban life through banning *becaks* and prostitution. Economic development was the New Order's *raison d'être*, and to oppose policies that would support it, placed the writer as an oppositional figure.

The *Penembak Misterius* Trilogy

Recently Marshall Clark has written a paper on *Wisanggeni, Sang Buronan* which discusses the novel in terms of its incorporation of a *wayang* character and *petrus*.¹⁷⁴ However in comparison to the first three stories in *Penembak Misterius*, *Wisanggeni, Sang Buronan* is an abstract or metaphorical addressing of *petrus*. This section focuses on the first part of *Penembak Misterius*, which is titled: *Penembak Misterius: Trilogi*. These stories show Seno's opposition to the killings of suspected criminals during the early to mid-80s. The literary practices used in the stories also show the range of styles present in much of his writing: real (*Bunyi Hujan di atas Genting*), surreal (*Grhhh*) and postmodern (*Keroncong Pembunuhan*). However, as the stories are representations of micronarratives they are all to a certain extent, postmodern. The stories also show his tendency to use fiction as a medium for dealing with issues which affect the public. The stories, *Keroncong Pembunuhan* (The Murder Song), *Bunyi Hujan di atas Genting* (The Sound of Rain on Tiles) and *Grhhh* (Grhhh), show Seno's concern for political issues. As the stories address overtly political issues through postmodern forms of expression *Penembak Misterius* is particularly relevant to this thesis.

Penembak Misterius was Seno's fifth book. Previously, he had published three collections of poetry¹⁷⁵ one collection of short stories and written an unpublished novel. These works were generally introspective and personal. The poems, in particular were stark and bleak. The poems are explorations of feelings and emotions, rather than of an external reality. Seno's reliance on subjective metaphor positions the poems as being distinctly 'modern'.¹⁷⁶ Numerous stories in *Penembak Misterius* however are clearly socially engaged. That is, they involve issues beyond the individual writer; the themes of the stories are concerned with problems facing the society he lives in. The *petrus* stories are just three of eight such stories in the collection. Other subjects of the political stories include poverty (*Seorang Wanita di Halte Bus*), political conformism (*Semangkin d/h semakin*), greed (*Helikopter*) and the urban poor (*Loket*).¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁴ Clark, 2004.

¹⁷⁵ *Mati, Mati, Mati* (Dead, Dead, Dead, 1975), *Bayi Mati* (Dead Baby, 1978), *Catatan-Catatan Mira Sato* (The Notes of Mira Sato, 1978)

¹⁷⁶ Keith Foulcher, *On being a Modern Writer*. 2001, unpublished.

¹⁷⁷ In *Hidung Seorang Pegawai Negeri* (A Government Officials Nose, in *Dunia Sukab*) and *Darah itu Merah, Jenderal* (Blood is Red, General, in *Saksi Mata*), Seno deals addresses the connection between corrupt politicians and human rights abuses.

Bunyi Hujan is the story that most clearly resembles the information that I have on the *petrus* killings. The cinematic and dramatic *Keroncong Pembunuhan* seems to be an appropriation of the *petrus* theme into a different context, just as *Grhhh* uses it for a moral infused surrealist story. *Bunyi Hujan di Atas Genting* is set in an urban *kampung* and, typical of Seno's stories contains very few characters. This story focuses on one person, Sawitri; it is an exploration of her anxiety while she waits for her partner to come home, fearing that he has been killed and will one day be found, half hidden beneath a sack at the end of the lane where she lives. She is fearful as some of the other bodies that she has seen were Pamuji's friends, all of whom were tattooed.¹⁷⁸ Pamuji is also tattooed. The tattoos of the corpses have been damaged by the bullet holes, even when they are not located in the lethal areas of the body.¹⁷⁹ Sawitri has the impression that the person who did the shooting, did so in part to damage the tattoo and to make the victim suffer as much as possible before dying. The sadistic deaths of Pamuji's friends aggravates Sawitri's anxiety as she waits for Pamuji's possible return. The bodies always appear at the end of the lane, after the rain has stopped and always seem to be looking in her direction. The sound of rain falling on roof tiles becomes a signal that a body will soon appear at the end of the lane; each time it rains she believes she may find out whether Pamuji has been killed. The rain draws Sawitri to a potential climax in her wait for Pamuji. This climax, similar to *Keroncong Pembunuhan* and in *Sarman*¹⁸⁰, is not resolved at the story's conclusion.

Bunyi Hujan does not problematize the guilt of the suspected criminals. Instead Seno emphasises the suffering that has resulted from the widespread. As such this feature is similar to the lack of discussion on competing nationalism in the *Saksi Mata* stories. However, in showing the effects of the murders, Seno has used a passive and helpless figure. Sawitri is dependent on news of Pamuji – he determines her existence, even in his absence. Sawitri's passiveness is not a positive portrayal of women. For this reason, it is a particularly depressing and pessimistic story: there are no alternatives given, Sawitri has no way out of her horrible fate of indefinite waiting and the story only ends when the narrator tells Alina that, 'the story isn't over yet' – that is, the murders are still continuing. Sawitri's waiting must continue. It is the defending of a criminal class identified as guilty that makes the *petrus* stories a significant part of Seno's oeuvre. The victims Seno defends are not as transparently 'innocent' as either Clara or those in *Saksi Mata*. This engagement with moral ambiguities shows Seno's consistency in representing a diverse range of micronarratives.

¹⁷⁸ Ajidarma, 1993, p. 20.

¹⁷⁹ Or as it is in the story, '*bagian yang mematikan*' (deadly parts).

¹⁸⁰ The conclusion to *Sarman* is marked by the interference of the person who listening to the story being told. The narrator subsequently tells the person listening that what happens to Sarman is not important.

Historical Fiction

The stories of *Saksi Mata*, *Jazz Parfum dan Insiden*, *Clara* and *Jakarta, Suatu Ketika* are examples of where Seno has incorporated historical events into his fiction. This has been an integral part of his 'micronarrative' fictions. The writing of history as 'fiction' has helped to soften the impact of the political message in a time of sensitivity towards various political issues. Where the narratives of certain ethnic groups reject the New Order doctrines on state unity, Seno has obscured their specific origins in a fictional text. According to Michael Bodden much of Seno's socially engaged works were published in 'an atmosphere in which banning was still very much a possibility'.¹⁸¹ This may have been the case, but it is also likely that there was an emerging middle class that was much in favour of the need for a more open and democratic government. It is also possible that any ban on Seno's work would not have persisted beyond the fall of the New Order, nor would have been very effective. By using the medium of fiction, Seno was able to disseminate the perspectives of those who have been suppressed by the New Order government.

Through using a fictional form, Seno has been able to lift eyewitness accounts of atrocities (*Saksi Mata*, *Clara*, *Jazz, Parfum dan Insiden*), directly from non-fiction resources and present them to a public with limited access to perspective which contrasted with the New Order's.¹⁸² Throughout the works, Seno doesn't provide explicit information that the stories are set in East Timor, yet dates remind readers of the historical context. In doing so, he avoids scrutiny from potential censors, but conveys his message to readers used to metaphorical and suggestive writing. However, stories such as *Clara* and *Jakarta, Suatu Ketika* state their setting. For this reason they could be considered slightly bolder discussions of contemporary political problems – something allowed by the regime's decline. Seno reconciles the contrast between the two independent genres in his statement: 'when journalism is silenced, literature must speak. Because while journalism speaks with facts, literature speaks with the truth.'¹⁸³ Faruk H.T. has recognized Seno's incorporation of fact within 'fiction' and states that 'Seno tries to stay loyal to each discourses conventions, not merging one set of rules with the other.' He suggests that the main challenge in doing so is 'how to change between one set of rules to a different set of rules.'¹⁸⁴ Faruk seems to be suggesting that these examples of Seno's texts are superficial explorations of postmodernist ideas.

The merging of fiction with non-fiction is also a comment upon the postmodernist argument that all forms of discourse have an element of fiction to them and that no text can hope to give an

¹⁸¹ Bodden, 1999, p. 153.

¹⁸² Maier, 1999, p. 255.

¹⁸³ Seno Gumira Ajidarma, *Ketika jurnalisme dibungkam sastra harus bicara*, Yogyakarta: Yayasan Benteng Budaya: 1997, p.1.

¹⁸⁴ Faruk H.T., 2001, p. 149.

objective description of 'reality.' There is only 'discourse' and differences between 'fiction' and 'non-fiction' are trivial. Seno's use of footnotes in fictional texts is an example of Seno incorporating non-fictional elements into a different medium. Many of these footnotes only give trivial information pertaining to the cultural background of certain popular culture elements in his fictions. Many of the references are to aspects of Western culture, so, the need for these become redundant when the audience is already familiar with what is being referred to. The footnotes disrupt the reading, rather than seriously confronting notions about the conventions of writing fiction.

The major literary development throughout the New Order was the experimentation in absurd or surrealist literature. Writers such as Putu Wijaya, Sutardji Calzoum Bachri and Iwan Simatupang are considered to be the pioneers of the absurd aesthetic in Indonesian literature.¹⁸⁵ The style of surrealist writing changed throughout the last 30 years. Delving into the unconscious and the irrational was considered as an attempt to escape the hyper-rationalism of the New Order's modern nation state. In 'Subversion or Escapism?' Paul Tickell questions the position of absurd literature and its ability to undermine dominant ideologies. However, Maier sees a whole generation of writers as being lost to an attempt on criticising the New Order.¹⁸⁶ Absurd literature in Indonesia has been introspective and has taken, at best, highly metaphorical and indirect approaches to social criticism. Others argue that the deeper questioning of the possibilities of existence was seen as necessary in the face of economic greed and overt materialism. Iwan Simatupang's *The Pilgrim* is one example of where an author's concern is removed from specific social issues. The combination of social criticism and absurdity distinguishes Seno's literature from previous literary styles.

Grhhh combines surrealism with overt social criticism. 'Escaping' into surrealism has provided a vehicle for expressing subversive ideas. The story's protagonist is a low ranking detective called Sarman.¹⁸⁷ Initially, Sarman is portrayed sympathetically as he is burdened by an overwhelming responsibility to get rid of the many zombies that are roaming throughout the unnamed 'capital city'. Like characters in *Sebuah Pertanyaan Untuk Cinta* (A Question for Love)¹⁸⁸, Sarman is having an affair.¹⁸⁹ In this case, Sarman seeks respite from his daily problems at Markonah's street side stall. However, the moment he finds relief his walkie-talkie calls him back to the

¹⁸⁵ Harry Aveling, *Rumah Sastra Indonesia*, Magelang: Indonesiatara, 2002, p. 83.

¹⁸⁶ Maier, 1999, p. 258.

¹⁸⁷ Sarman, like 'Sukab' is a name frequently used throughout Seno's stories for male characters.

¹⁸⁸ Seno Gumira Ajidarma, *Sebuah Pertanyaan Untuk Cinta*, Jakarta: Gramedia Pustaka Utama, 2002.

¹⁸⁹ Tommy F. Awuy discusses how Seno's characters are frequently involved in affairs, in 'Politik Imajinasi dan Ironi dalam Cerpen-cerpen Seno Gumira Ajidarma', in *Horison*, XXXIV/3/2000, p. 16. Another case of where Seno has shown love to lack the possibility of creating happiness is in the collection of stories, *Atas Nama Malam* (In the Name of the Night).

impossible task of ridding the city of zombies.¹⁹⁰ Sarman's plight is used to foreground broader social issues, including the press and environmental destruction. The press is criticised for 'always overdoing trivial issues, while covering up the real problems'.¹⁹¹ While the Minister for the Environment appears after the environment is damaged through the attempts to wipe out the zombies. He argues 'why do you have to use guided missiles? Don't you care about wasting all those expensive weapons?'.¹⁹² These criticisms rest upon Sarman's broader submission to the realization that even though the presence of the zombies doesn't make sense, 'other things in this country also don't make sense, but they're still accepted as being normal'.¹⁹³ A surreal plot is used to show the guilt of the individual policeman in implementing the *petrus* killings.

Conclusions

Seno has used micronarratives to comment on issues arising during the New Order's reign, and at the time of its decline. Postmodernism rejects singular and universal truths. Instead it supports groups who exist outside the dominant cultural values. As has been noted though, postmodernism destroys the cultural dominant, but fails to construct a positive alternative.¹⁹⁴ In the examples given above postmodern cultural practices have been used to subvert the ideologies that subordinate marginal ethnic groups. Through transforming postmodern literature into a literature of social criticism and political agency, Seno has helped to re-shape dominant literary practices. The political climate may currently be slightly more stable, however the trauma of 1997 and 1998 continues to pose pertinent questions that remain unanswered.

A role of the writer is to show readers what is neglected by the mainstream and dominant cultures. The success of the literature thus in part depends on the extent to which the writer has prevented the intrusion of ideals which reflect those of the politically and culturally powerful. Throughout the works mentioned above, Seno has sought to express the problems associated with being an ostracised and disempowered ethnic 'other'. To include the perspectives of ethnic identities excluded from the coherent and unified Indonesian 'personality' is a political statement, advocating a more inclusive and pluralist society. It does not, however, elevate the text to a position beyond rebuke. Particularly in *Clara*, Seno is seen to follow some of the stereotypes of ethnic Chinese that are a part of their stigmatisation in Indonesian society. The moral 'purity' of the text is not the issue in this thesis, but instead it is how Seno has sought to bring formally taboo topics into public discourse. The irony is that these micronarratives are being told by a writer who is of the Indonesian cultural centre. Seno is Javanese and he holds a stable position

¹⁹⁰ Ajidarma, 1993, p. 25.

¹⁹¹ Ajidarma, 1993, p. 29.

¹⁹² Ajidarma, 1993, p. 31.

¹⁹³ Ajidarma, 1993, p. 30.

¹⁹⁴ Bodden in Foulcher and Day, 2002, p. 317.

as a journalist and editor at top Jakartan magazines. He is not found wanting for ways of publishing his articles or short stories. His short story collections and novels are published by the top publishers.

3.2 Characterisation

'It may have escaped your attention, but I slipped in, a moment ago, a word that should have made you prick up your ears. I spoke about my essence and being true to my essence. There is much I could say about essence and its ramifications; but this is not the right occasion. Nevertheless, you must be asking yourselves, how in these anti-essential days, these days of fleeting identities that we pick up and wear and discard like clothing, can I justify speaking of my essence as an African writer?'

J.M. Coetzee, *Elizabeth Costello*¹⁹⁵

The previous section analysed some themes of Seno's fiction. This part isolates one aspect of his literature that is independent of broader social contexts, or is used to reflect them. It is hoped that the conclusions made about the characters in the stories discussed below can be used as points of reference for other characters that appear in Seno's fiction.

This section looks at how the characters in some of Seno's stories are postmodern. As stated earlier, the main features of characterisation in postmodern fiction are related to an unstable or shifting personality, a lack of psychological depth, and an incoherent, or paradoxical personality. Postmodernist theory on characters has emphasized the fundamental tenet that characters have selves, rather than a single, unified and coherent self. There are different levels of problematizations of 'character' in postmodern fiction. The flat, personality-free characters are postmodern, while characters who have their behaviour or thoughts limited by the intervention of the author are exemplary of a postmodern text, rather than being particularly postmodern themselves. It remains possible for the author to explore a figure's personality and identity, only to thwart the character's ultimate independence through devices which refer the reader to the construction of the text. However, in this section, I will focus on the plurality of a character's self and their lack of essence.

A Sniper and Saleh

My discussion of postmodern characters is based on two stories from the *Penembak Misterius* collection – one of which (as was *Bunyi Hujan*), is from the *Penembak Misterius Trilogy*. Both stories have male protagonists who experience epiphanies which drastically influence the stories' action and both are socially engaged. I will provide a summary of each story and then a discussion of their similarities and differences. The summaries focus on what happens to the

¹⁹⁵ J.M.Coetzee, *Elizabeth Costello*, Knopf: Sydney, 2003, p. 43.

sniper (*Keroncong Pembunuhan*) and Saleh (*Helikopter*) and their perspectives on the stories' action.

Keroncong Pembunuhan is told from the sniper's perspective. He is the protagonist and the murderer of 'thousands of innocent people'.¹⁹⁶ At the beginning, the sniper is indifferent to shooting his pre-determined target; he just wants to finish the job quickly so he can 'return home and have a beer'.¹⁹⁷ The sniper is caught between being indifferent to his job and being fully aware of his physical environment. The reader is referred to the heightened senses of the sniper, whom takes particular notice of the young women wearing revealing dresses, the taste of the sea air, his hunger, the sound of his boss's voice and the *keroncong* music.¹⁹⁸ He also remarks that he enjoys spying on people without their knowing and that their faces 'look different' when viewed through a telescope.¹⁹⁹ The sniper is connected with his gut feeling – with his emotions, rather than his logic. It is this awareness that foreshadows his confrontation with his boss. As in other stories in the collection, the sniper experiences an epiphany.²⁰⁰ The sniper, while waiting for his orders to shoot, sternly questions his boss on why his target should be assassinated. Suddenly, the sniper advocates judicial treatment of suspected criminals. He is no longer submissive and rejects his boss's statement about the intended target as being 'a traitor to his nation and people'.²⁰¹ The sniper becomes independent in determining his actions and is fuelled by a purpose not to shoot the wrong person. The story concludes before the shot has been fired, finishing only with the line, 'this will surely make the oldies think of the past' and one line from a *keroncong* song. The sniper, though, has determined that he will shoot the man responsible for organizing the shootings, rather than the previously intended victim.

Helikopter is the story of Saleh - a name that means 'pious, virtuous, godly'. Saleh is well respected and occupies a position of authority in his community. At the beginning his behaviour is contrasted with the mass infatuation of the population with materialism and consumer goods. This is evident through the prevalence of Mercedes that crawl through the Jakartan city streets. Wealth and personal significance is gained through owning a Mercedes and is the only evident goal of his society. Saleh can only make sense of this through commenting, '*terlalu...*', roughly meaning 'things have gone too far.' His response to this, though, is not to look further into his religious teachings for guidance as an anti-dote for the obsession with materialism, but to purchase a helicopter.²⁰² Saleh shocks those who know him, as he seems to have abandoned his

¹⁹⁶ Ajidarma, 1993, p. 11.

¹⁹⁷ Ajidarma, 1993, p 6.

¹⁹⁸ Ajidarma, 1993, p. 4.

¹⁹⁹ Ajidarma, 1993, p. 7.

²⁰⁰ Sarman in *Sarman*, Saleh in *Helikopter*

²⁰¹ Ajidarma, 1993, p. 5.

²⁰² The story's humour lies in its denial of how the reader expects someone with Saleh's reputation to act.

ethics. The story narrates the shock of those who feel belittled by his ostentatious display of wealth – those who own Mercedes have lost their status as being ‘wealthy’.

Both stories feature characters with paradoxical and contrasting ways of acting. There is little continuity between the sniper of the first half and with his actions that challenge the authority of his boss – the person who is informing him of who and when to shoot. This discontinuity is central to the creation of characters that do not appear to have a definable *way of being*. Saleh and the sniper cannot be considered as standing for anything because they are subject to changing their beliefs, thoughts or actions at any moment. They are not moral agents or exemplars of a better way of being. That Seno does not touch on the cause of their changes in behaviour indicates his belief in the futility of doing so: characters act in a perplexing range of ways and knowledge of why they change (or ‘develop’) is impossible to obtain. This removal of characters from cause-effect relationships poses a new way of considering the way in which they interact with their circumstances. The sniper is both a murderer of innocent people and someone who has prevented more innocent people being killed. The strength of this story is that either aspect of the sniper is not emphasised. He is morally ambivalent.

The epiphanies experienced by Saleh and the sniper are different. In *Keroncong Pembunuhan* the sniper’s epiphany is positive. The sniper is no longer submissive to his boss’s orders and acts independently. He questions his boss and uses his power as a sniper to find the person who has selected the target – the sniper then aims at the source of the *petrus* killings rather than at a possibly innocent petty criminal. However, Saleh’s epiphany leads to his following in the practice that he had condemned earlier in the story. He shows the farce of the general obsession with expensive cars, through purchasing a helicopter. This act does not bring Saleh liberation from the malaise afflicting those around him, but it does show up the futility of pursuing expensive goods as a means to validating one’s existence. Saleh creates a new referent, after the Mercedes no longer sufficiently signifies financial wealth. Through his complicity in his critique of others, Saleh’s behaviour accords with the irony of postmodern social criticism.

The two stories offer contrasting examples of two characters interaction with absurd circumstances. In the first example, the sniper’s epiphany leads to a positive personal reformation – he liberates himself from subservience to those with (accepted) authority over him. His introspection – which Seno does not directly describe – allows him to discover his own powers to influence his context. Despite taking place in an unquestionably murky environment of criminality and corruption, the story has a strongly positive conclusion: change at an individual level can

affect more general circumstances.²⁰³ The pro-activeness of the sniper also contrasts with the passivity of characters in other stories (some in the same collection) such as *Seorang Wanita di Halte Bus*, *Loket*, and in the aforementioned *Bunyi Hujan di atas Genting*.

Saleh's transformation is equally dramatic but not as positive. He criticizes the materialism of others by taking it to absurd and impractical levels. His epiphany leads to his decline as a moral figure rather than liberation from a mentality held by those around him. Thus, Seno's stories have an ambiguous attitude towards the role of plural selves: there is nothing certain about what will happen if one acts more in tune with one's conscience, at the expense of one's logic. If postmodernism argues for the presence of multiple selves and conflicting belief, it is the sniper's characterisation that best exemplifies this idea. The sniper remains more contradictory than Saleh, as he (the sniper) realises his guilt yet continues to assassinate a yet-to-be-proven guilty figure at the story's conclusion. While, on the other hand, Saleh's personality can be seen in more clearly divided parts: Saleh as virtuous community leader and Saleh as hypocrite. The sniper more successfully combines the paradoxical behaviour and leaves few clues about what his 'true' 'personality' is.

The Case of Sukab

Another example of where Seno has problematised ideas regarding character, is through his frequent use of the name 'Sukab'. Other names that Seno uses often are 'Sarman' and 'Alina' (for a female character). As 'Sukab' is not a standard Indonesian name it has come to be identified with Seno's fiction. The sense of Seno's 'ownership' of this name is evident in the adverse reaction to Agus Noor's use of it, after he published a short story with the title 'Sukab'.²⁰⁴ Below, I will discuss how Seno has used the name Sukab for a specific type of character, as well as to question received ideas of where a character begins and ends.

Sukab is identifiable as a 'common person' or a 'layman' (*seorang tokoh rakyat*) – he is not wealthy and he struggles in many aspects of daily life. He neither performs extraordinary things nor thinks extraordinary thoughts. However, through the use of characters called Sukab, Seno is able to engage with ideas and problems which are common or relevant to much of Indonesia's populace. Although, Sukab is part of a 'simple' world, and is himself uncomplicated, many of the Sukab stories are imbued with understated philosophy. These short stories might not be the *magnum opus* that will guarantee Seno's acknowledgement as a great writer, however they give

²⁰³ This vision of personal change also resembles the sentiments expressed in Seno's essay, '*Reformehong*', which asserts the importance of change in oneself rather than seeking to change others. This essay is a powerful indictment of the euphoria that followed the overthrow of Suharto in 1998.

²⁰⁴ Agus Noor, *Bapak Presiden Yang Terhormat*, Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2000.

readers an idea of the way in which he believes in the plurality of the self and the multiple possibilities for one character. On Sukab, Seno has written, 'in fiction Sukab is not the name of a character. Sukab is just a name that I use for all characters, just because I am too lazy to think of a name that suits the characters so that it is convincing and so on.'²⁰⁵ With slight contradiction he has also written (in the same text), 'that name just comes to mind every time I imagine a common person.'²⁰⁶

Seno's most recent comic has a Sukab as the central character. The book is apparently the first in a series titled *Sukab, Intel Melayu (Sukab, The Malay Spy)*, the first being, *Misteri Harta Centini (The Mystery of the Centini Wealth)*. Like other Sukabs, the Sukab-as-spy is hapless and is often a victim of his circumstances. Despite being used to find the missing wealth of the 'Suroto' family, Sukab has never solved a case during his career as a private investigator. Sukab dresses in the styles of spies from films and is incongruous in the Jakartan landscape.²⁰⁷ He can't become a spy without adopting the practices of the spies he has either read about or seen in movies. Sukab muses, 'I'm a spy, but why doesn't it feel as if I'm in a film?'²⁰⁸ This self-reflexive intertextuality emphasises the role of other texts in influencing the formation of the text. Sukab becomes a parody of the conventions of the spy character. This aspect of parody and repetition of previous styles or characters is a part of the postmodern condition. However, he spends most of his time avidly reading philosophy texts or literary fiction: his personality and interests conflict with his purpose in the comic. As such Sukab is made to be a mere literary convention rather than an independent and original character.

Sukab also opposes New Order ideologies through his lack of material ambition. He is not rich, not materialistic, not aspirational and he is not a part of the New Order drive to modernisation and economic prosperity. Sukab is aloof or liberated from such worldly concerns and is more concerned with abstract and philosophical issues. Even Sukab the private investigator is more interested in reading philosophy and literature than with solving the crimes he has been assigned to. He aims for enriching his mind and soul rather than his material or physical or material interests. He is an alternative citizen.

Conclusions

Seno has overcome some conventions of modernist fiction through using characters with shifting identities. He has shown the plurality of selves in the three cases discussed above. In the cases

²⁰⁵ Seno Gumira Ajidarma, *Dunia Sukab: sejumlah cerita*, Jakarta: Kompas, 2001, p. viii.

²⁰⁶ Ajidarma, 2001, p. viii.

²⁰⁷ John Roosa, "James Bond Jakarta Style" in *Inside Indonesia*, January-March, 2003.

²⁰⁸ Seno Gumira Ajidarma, *Sukab Intel Melayu: Misteri Harta Centini*, Jakarta: Kepustakaan Populer Gramedia, 2002.

of Saleh and the sniper, he did this within one character, while in Sukab's case, Seno has used 'him' in numerous texts. Sukab has become a 'variation on a theme' with no fixed identity. He is an embodiment of an idea rather than a *real* character. He is someone who is constantly changing. There is no clear knowledge of where Sukab's character begins and ends. The specificity of Sukab's character is broadened – he is not just one character, but he is several. Importantly, though he is not *any* person. Sukab has a personality: we recognise him by his lack of wealth, social inadequacy and frequent misfortune. As such, this does not represent a clear break with modernist notions of character. It is Sukab's 'depth' that prevents him from being fully postmodern. Nonetheless, Sukab remains a character inspired by postmodern notions of plural identity, despite being fixed to a more abstract and general notion of being a poor and hapless urbanite. Again, this postmodern idea of character is used to sympathize with the common person.

Saleh and the sniper are two polarities of reactions against the cultural and social conditions during the New Order. Saleh is representative of a morally base leader, he has no firm belief in the principles he claims to represent and he gives them up for more worldly pleasures. However, the lack of belief in any morals or principles has become seriously distorted, as those who accuse others of abandoning their morals are shown to be hypocrites. Those who shout, 'even though we only have a Mercedes, we still have our self-respect' become parodies of a community's righteous leaders. The connection to the contemporary social condition in Indonesia where the idea of being a politician is directly linked to practicing 'corruption, collusion and nepotism' could hardly be lost on the readers as thinly veiled social criticism. The sniper, however, is a powerful example of non-conformity and activism. His confrontation with his boss, is a potent denial of showing deference to figures of authority.

In Seno's fictions Saleh, the sniper and Sukab 'pick up and wear' different identities. They are shown to be in a continual state of *becoming*, without ever having a singular and stable identity. Sukab, is the clearest example of this. Unlike Saleh and the sniper, however, Sukab is frequently shown to be a construct of the author and that he is not an independent character with his own free will. Sukab's identity, vocabulary and ways of thinking are shown to be dependent upon the cultures around him. A character such as Sukab is limited by his predecessors in similar fictions and by the author's own interventions. Sukab: each Sukab is independent of the previous Sukab, he has no history, no connection is made between the Sukab in the many stories in which he appears. We must consider each Sukab individually but our of him is informed by all the other *Sukabs*. Sukab is both, ironically with and without a history.

These three characters all give new commentaries on what it means to not have a single essence. Saleh and the sniper are characters of greater self-determinance than Sukab, all three though, are merely understandable and knowable by their actions and not by anything that may connect one action with the next. We understand them independently of their thoughts or motivation. The agency of the sniper in particular best reflects Bodden's observation that 'a central tension in the works of these Indonesian postmodernists is produced by the need to resist a powerfully dominating unitary state'.²⁰⁹

This section has identified some trends in the characters in some of Seno's fictions and has embellished the case for his classification as a postmodernist writer. However, I have not argued that all characters are exemplary of the postmodern condition. The limited scope of this section can be seen in that his most recent stories show no clear continuation of themes expressed in the stories above.

3.3 Metafiction

'It is not a good idea to interrupt the narrative too often, since storytelling works by lulling the reader into a dreamlike state in which the time and space of the real world fade away, superseded by the time and space of the fiction. Breaking into the dream draws attention to the constructedness of the story, and plays havoc with the realist illusion.'
From J.M.Coetzee, *Elizabeth Costello*.²¹⁰

In my earlier discussion on micronarratives, I discussed how Seno has used historical events in his short stories: in these examples, there was an indistinct border between what was real and what was a result of the author's creativity. This section, however, focuses on how Seno refers readers to the devices involved in writing a fictional text. There is no surreptitious disguising of unpleasant narratives, but rather an ostentatious display of the text's own devices. Writing that incorporates foregrounding asserts that it is 'literature', it is a 'type of media', not an unproblematic *re-presentation* of the world. Seno's texts have frequently shown how it is a construct of the author. This contrasts with an absent author in modernist or realist literature. Examples of this appear in *Wisanggeni*, *Sang Buronan*, stories in the *Penembak Misterius* and *Kematian Donny Osmond* collections and *Clara*. The different ways in which Seno foregrounds the presence of the author gives further legitimacy to position him as a postmodernist author. Where the author's presence is foregrounded, I will refer to that process as a 'postmodern climax'. It is at these moments that the text differentiates itself from other types of literature which seek to maintain the 'realist illusion' of the texts. An example of the reference to the constructedness of the text appears in *Keroncong Asmara*. The relevant sentences appear at the story's

²⁰⁹ Bodden in Foulcher and Day, 2002, p. 295.

opening and conclusion: 'because this is a love story it must have a romantic beginning' – with an almost identical sentence at the story's end.²¹¹ Seno's incorporation of a storyteller (*juru cerita*), is also a reference to the indigenous oral literary tradition of Indonesia. In this case, Seno is able to connect the 'modern' with the 'traditional past', and at the same time proclaim the irrelevance of the two previously polarized classifications. In some cases what seems to be 'postmodern' may also have a relevance to the specific case of Indonesia. This device which resembles postmodern practices may be an indication the fiction is part of an 'orally oriented literary system'.²¹²

Postmodern literature is marked by the instability of the fictional text. This distinguishes postmodernism from realist literature, where the world is reproduced in a textual form, and surrealist literature which highlights the irrational and subconscious in giving meaning to 'real' existence. The 'realist illusion' is maintained: the methods and the devices of the author are not revealed. Postmodernism, however denies the referential ability of any text: it believes that there is only an arbitrary connection between the world and the way in which meaning can be given to it as, there is an endless deferral of any final referent. This is reflected in the ways the author shows up his text as being a text that attempts to refer to the world and, in turn shows up its own weaknesses. The postmodernist conclusion is that only discourse about discourse can be created. The 'truth' (or knowledge) that is created is restricted by the form and devices of the text's discourse. Based on this, postmodernism argues that truth is relative and subjective; that there are truths, not a single, universal 'truth'.²¹³

What creates instability within postmodern fiction? Postmodernists believe that our concept of what a novel is, deeply influences the 'creative' process, thus one way of escaping this trap is to display one's self-conscious to the tropes that one is repeating. *The French Lieutenant's Woman* by John Fowles²¹⁴ is a common reference to fiction that plays 'with the notion of history as narrative and with the retrospective ironies that can go with that'.²¹⁵ Christopher Butler in *Postmodernism: A Very Short Introduction*, describes it as postmodern based on, its 'deliberate revealing of the author's manipulations, as he offers a postmodernist commentary on the

²¹⁰ Coetzee, 2003, p. 16.

²¹¹ Ajidarma, 2001, p. 4.

²¹² Marshall Clark, "Democratizing the Literary Experience: Metafiction in the works of Agusta Wibisono", <http://www.educ.utas.edu.au/users/tle/JOURNAL/Clark/MarshallClark.html>

²¹³ Seno's recent story "Penjaga Malam dan Tiang Listrik" (in *Koran Tempo*, 16 February 2003), is an allegorical story based on the postmodernist ideas of the limits of representation. In this story, the nightwatchman's realisation that he has no way to signify the time when it is before or past the hour, has particularly violent repercussions.

²¹⁴ John Fowles, *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, London: Cape, 1969.

²¹⁵ Butler, 2002, p. 70.

Victorian period, for example on Victorian attitudes to sex, and on his own plot, which parallels or parodies those of the Victorian novel, particularly Hardy.’²¹⁶

Alina the Listener

The second section of the *Penembak Misterius* collection is titled, ‘Stories for Alina’.²¹⁷ The stories that are featured in the ‘stories for Alina’, are united by their tales of woe. The stories promise little hope of the ‘happy ending’ that may be associated with oral literature (the style in which the stories begin). The designated subjects include ‘despair’ (*Sarman*), ‘loss’ (*Bandana*), ‘fear’ (*Bunyi Hujan di atas Genting*) and ‘destruction’ (*Becak Terakhir di Dunia*). Most of these stories begin with Alina asking for a story to be told to her, from an unnamed storyteller. For example, *Sarman* begins as follows: “‘Tell me a story about despair,’ said Alina to the storyteller. So, the story teller told her a story about Sarman.”²¹⁸ This technique identifies the piece as being postmodern. Although this type of introduction corresponds with some of the aims of postmodernism, it does not indicate that the device is *exclusively* postmodern. The postmodern-ness is affected by how the two ‘layers’ of fiction interact. How does the act of narrating influence or limit the events that are narrated? Are they shown to be dependent, with one layer having power of the other? For example, in the story from which the above is quoted, the narrator does not interfere with the story’s progress, other than to refuse to give a conclusion. The narrated story exists independently of the narrator. As such, the problematization of text-author is limited. How significantly does the self-reflexive reference influence the text? Does it influence all of it, or is it just an opening or concluding ‘packaging’ device? It is possible that these devices can be used with only a superficial influence on the text.

Bandana

Bandana also shows traces of textual instability. *Bandana*, as other stories in the *Kematian Donny Osmond* collection, has the standard text interspersed with photographs, comic adaptations of the text, and typographical irregularities. Like the *Stories for Alina*, the story begins with ‘tell me a story about loss,” said Upik to the storyteller. So, the storyteller told a story about a bandana.’ The story is of two main characters: Nana, a child in a super-rich family, who seemingly can have anything she wants, whose hobby is tennis and who is emotionally attached to a bandana she has received from Gabriela Sabatini. The other is the storyteller: he is the son of a security guard and works as a ballboy at the sport center where Nana plays tennis. He frequently compares his life unfavourably to that of Nana’s, given her material luxuries. For example, ‘my fate is truly different from hers’; ‘how lucky she is’; ‘I always think of Nana, but is it

²¹⁶ Bulter, 2002, p. 70.

²¹⁷ *Cerita untuk Alina* comprises of: *Sarman*, *Becak Terakhir di Dunia (atawa Rambo)*, *Melati dalam Pot, Dua Anak Kecil*, *Tragedi Asih Istrinya Sukab*, *Seorang Wanita di Halte Bis* and *Semangkin (d/h Semakin)*.

²¹⁸ Ajidarma, 1993, p. 39.

possible that she ever thinks for a second about me? That is the clear difference between my fate and Nana's.²¹⁹ Early in the text, the narrator asks himself, 'can a girl like Nana ever suffer?'²²⁰ This is the central problem of the text, as it is the problem the narrator gives himself the power to answer at the story's conclusion. The narrator discovers that Nana can 'suffer' (*menderita*): this happens when she loses her bandana. It is the narrator who has the prerogative to tell a story in which she gets it back, or does not. Finally the poor ballboy has significance in Nana's life; he now has the ability to compare favourably to her. The 'postmodern climax' of this text is as follows:

'Actually, now I can become a meaningful person in Nana's life. Now, I can determine her fate. I'm a high school kid, who takes the same subjects as Nana, but I'm just a ballboy who gets bossed around. Now, I can decide whether a rich kid like Nana will continue to suffer or become happy. I'm thinking about it. Which one will I choose? A ballboy whose father is a security guard rarely has an opportunity like this.'²²¹

The story's conclusion is determined by the emotions of the young boy who has been treated poorly by Nana in the past: events are not narrated as something that has already happened, but as something that is in the process of occurring – while the story is being narrated – the events are determined by what is narrated rather than vice versa. Thus, *Bandana* problematizes the relationship between author and text more than in the case of the *Stories for Alina* or *Keroncong Asmara*. The story's conclusion lies fully in the hands of one of its characters and not in the hands of an omnipotent (and absent) author.

Wisanggeni, Sang Buronan; Clara; Negeri Senja

Marshall Clark's insightful essay on 'the use of the Wisanggeni as counter-discourse'²²² in Indonesian literature refers to Seno's use of this postmodernist device in his early novel, *Wisanggeni, Sang Buronan* (Wisanggeni the Outlaw).²²³ Clark states that 'the allusion to Hanoman's superior narration is intriguing, as it self-reflexively places the characters of the narrative on the same diegetic or narrative levels as the narrator.'²²⁴ The section Clark refers to is as follows:

'So, Hanoman sat on top of a rock and began his story. But o, forgive this senseless writer if I'm unable to retell the tale as well as the great Hanoman with his refined wisdom and wonderful storytelling ability...my ability as a pulp fiction writer is nothing...so dear reader you must bear with

²¹⁹ Ajidarma, 2001, p. 23.

²²⁰ Ajidarma, 2001, p. 23.

²²¹ Ajidarma, 2001, p. 26.

²²² Marshall Clark, 'Too Many Wisanggenis: Reinventing the Wayang at the Turn of the Century', to be published in *Indonesia and the Malay World*, Vol. 32, No. 92, March 2004. Thanks to Marshall for sending me a copy of the script prior to its publication.

²²³ Seno Gumira Ajidarma, *Wisanggeni, Sang Buronan*, Yogyakarta: Benteng, 2000.

²²⁴ Clark, 2004, p. 7.

me and imagine that what is written here is but a grain of sand compared to the literary reality of the true events.'²²⁵

The reader is made aware of the compromised status of the text; of how the text is limited by the writer's apparent inability to write in a way that refers accurately to the events that are described. We are made aware of the inability of the text to fully represent what is being referred to.

Another postmodern climax in *Wisanggeni, Sang Buronan* reads as follows:

'The *dalang* stuck the Wisanggeni *wayang kulit* puppet into the banana tree trunk, on the ground, and grabbed hold of another puppet. At that moment, an unshaven man in ragged clothes, wearing a *caping*-hat and sandals from buffalo leather, slipped in amongst the audience.'²²⁶

This example of postmodern textual instability does not disturb the level of the final text. The *wayang* performance has been told as a narrative, rather than the descriptions of what is being performed at a *wayang* performance. However, at the novel's conclusion, Wisanggeni becomes a human being rather than staying as an inanimate *wayang kulit* puppet. This device works against those watching the *wayang* performance rather than the readers of the text. The joke is on the audience, rather than the readers. The audience is then shown to react negatively to the *real* presence of the character that they were watching only moments before. Wisanggeni, the outlaw, is no longer at a safe distance on the *wayang* screen, he is one of them. The passage reads,

'a number of people, sitting near the untidy man, finally became really angry.'

'let's throw him out! He's crazy!'

'Yeah. This is the tramp who likes to sit beneath the banyan tree in the city square. Scram! Don't disturb people who are watching *wayang*!'²²⁷

Clara, also deals with the problem of referring to events outside the text. In this case, the postmodern warning about the 'compromised' text works to show how the police may manipulate the rape victims stories in order to fit in with their 'legitimate version of events.' The statement reads as follows:

'so, the story you are going to hear is not her words, but my words. I've worked for years as a writer of reports and almost all of these reports have never been the same as reality. I've become an expert in turning bitter reality into a happy story, and the opposite also. I've turned patriotic events into politically subversive acts – the main thing is that the stories are manipulated to suit our needs.'²²⁸

²²⁵ Ajidarma, 2000, p. 26.

²²⁶ Ajidarma, 1999, p. 88.

²²⁷ Ajiarma, 1999, p. 89.

²²⁸ Ajidarma, 1999, p. 70.

A different aspect of textual instability is present in Seno's latest novel, *Negeri Senja*. Although, this is not particularly self-reflexive, it does make the reader aware of the constructedness of the text. While in *Wisanggeni, Sang Buronan*, the author addressed the reader in general, in this a particular reader is addressed – Alina. By doing so, the text's real reader has their reading of the novel disturbed, by the realisation they are not whom the text is intended for. The text is written for Alina, and the reader is made to feel like an intruder – reading something that is not for him or herself. The dialogue between the traveller and Alina from *Negeri Senja* is as follows:

'I don't know if you are going to believe me, Alina – I feel that I will never know, because you have never said anything to me, you've only listened with very curious eyes. But, when will I meet with you again, Alina, if I will never know when I will return? Just like I have never known, or, have always been afraid to know, whether you are waiting for me or not.'²²⁹

Also, in *Negeri Senja*, the phrase 'purportedly, and indeed only purportedly' (*konon dan memang hanya konon*) becomes a cliché within the text itself. Its repetition disturbs the fluidity of the text and it is used to highlight the set of stock phrases that are used throughout the creation of Seno's fictional world. The repetition of this phrase refers the reader the particular idiosyncrasies of the author who is constructing the text. Without its repetition this effect would not be possible, and it is indeed a more subtle way of referring to its authorial manipulation. *Sukab, Intel Melayu* as a parody of a detective cartoon, is also to a certain extent an example of metafiction. The metafiction of this form lies in its that 'in parodying one text (or kind of text), the parody text holds up a mirror to its own fictional practices, so that it is at once a fiction and a fiction about fictions'.

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Intertextuality and Footnotes

In texts such as *Jazz, Parfum dan Insiden, Matinya Seorang Penari Telanjang* and *Sukab, Intel Melayu*, Seno uses footnotes to give further information about what the characters are talking about. The footnotes often state how what has appeared is not original or are adapted from a major work of Indonesian fiction. The footnotes appear to be overstatements of the text's dependence on outside sources for its creation. This device refers to the diminishing possibilities for being original – and how writing fiction leads to endlessly repeating established formulas, until the text is reduced to a cliché of modern fiction. In these cases, the author is anticipating the interpretation of critic: the author's sources and influences have been laid bare. The author is making it known, that he is aware of his derivativeness. This is also evident in Seno's recent short story *Cintaku Jauh di Komodo* (My Love, Far off in Komodo).²³¹

²²⁹ Ajidarma, 2003, p. 10.

²³⁰ Simon Dentith, *Parody: The New Critical Idiom*, London: Routledge, 2000, p.14.

²³¹ Seno Gumira Ajidarma, "Cintaku Jauh di Komodo", *Kompas*, August 17, 2003.

The footnotes are borrowed from a different category of text: academic writing. However, the sources he uses for footnotes and what he requires footnotes to give an explanation of, are specifically, non-academic. An example of this is in the recent short story, *Rembulan dalam Cappuccino* (Moonshine in a Cappuccino), where Seno uses a sugar substitute as a source to give an explanation of what a cappuccino is.

Conclusions

Seno's metafictional texts have destabilised two kinds of relationships present in modernist fiction. The first is the problematisation of the author-text relationship. On numerous occasions Seno shows the interference of the author upon the construction of the final 'literary' product. It becomes evident that the characters and the text are compromised by their representation by an author who cannot successfully excise his influence from the act of narrating the fiction. The second is the author-reader relationship. In both *Wisanggeni*, *Sang Buronan* and *Negeri Senja* Seno shows the text to be a direct dialogue with the reader rather than seeking to maintain the 'realist illusion.'

The superficial and fleeting references to the text's fictionality do not present an enduring and sustainable trope for a more creative and complex contemporary fiction. Establishing a connection to an oral literary tradition positions the work in a specifically Indonesian context. However, there are other ways this link with tradition can be maintained and developed, whether through oral performance of the written text or through limiting the piece to an oral performance only.

The texts discussed above give an example of the different ways in which Seno has referred to the fictionality of his texts. In only a few of these cases have these devices been used for social criticism. However, it is on these occasions that this postmodernist device is most effective.

Establishing the case to see textual representation as something seriously problematic. To realize the problems in advocating singular, universal and transcendental truths – all of this is an attack on NO methods of creating and determining the meaning of events in 32 years of Suharto's reign. The lessons of Seno's texts should be applied to all readings of all ideologies.

3.4 An Engagement with Popular Culture

'Exciting like a martial arts story, wise like a book of philosophy, light as entertainment.'

²³²

'This book is guaranteed to be different. This is a literary text about teenagers, written by Seno Gumira Ajidarma. There are comics, an *otak-otak* recipe – it's confusing isn't it? Just read it for yourself.'²³³

'Call it fiction if you want, or non-fiction, it's up to you. It is just a metropolitan novel.'²³⁴

These three statements on the back covers of three of Seno's books invite the reader to see how the works break with certain limitations of genre. The reader is encouraged to consider these works as combinations of different literary forms. One aspect of this (the incorporation of comics) is an example of how Seno has negotiated new ways of classifying literature, by forcing readers to reconsider established rigid boundaries of form.

The influence of comics upon Seno's work is increasingly evident and forms a significant part of his work. Thus, it is necessary to analyse the way in which Seno has engaged with the comic form. In this section, I will attempt to map out the main features of Seno's comics. Doing so will provide broader knowledge of Seno's significance as a writer, as well as an insight into one aspect of contemporary Indonesian literature. Most importantly, Seno's comics should not be understood as being antithetical to his 'serious' writings (possibly being *Saksi Mata* or *Negeri Senja*). I argue that Seno's works cannot be classified as either being serious literature or popular but instead as a successful postmodernist negation of the hierarchical divisions, typical of modernist cultural aesthetics.

Comics

This section begins on the assumption that a comic is not considered to be high literature. However, comics are far from uniform and to discuss them in generic terms is belittling the breadth of their variation. In these cases, the form clearly does not hinder the expression of challenging and philosophical ideas. Political cartoons in the print media provide a different form to criticise political and social conditions. To consider comics only as a medium for entertainment neglects their complex development over time and place. Comics are considered a cultural product with a purpose limited to entertainment – they are not educative. They are considered a

²³² The back cover of *Wisanggeni Sang Buronan*. Seno Gumira Ajidarma, *Wisanggeni, Sang Buronan*, Yogyakarta: Bentang, 2000.

²³³ Seno Gumira Ajidarma, *Kematian Donny Osmond*, Jakarta: Penerbit Pustaka Utama, 2001, back cover.

genre that does not discuss serious issues nor explore the aesthetics or various dimensions of meaning. This perception is no doubt based on the abundance of comics that explicitly target young readers and which have become the overwhelming example of the form.

A discussion of Seno's comics, requires a definition of 'comic'. The *Oxford English Dictionary* states: '(a) a children's periodical, mainly in the form of comic strips. (b) a similar publication intended for adults.' The OED recognises their multiple form, but states that comics are primarily for children, with some intended for adults, incorporating the style of children's' comics. Adult 'comics' must differ by their content rather than form. However, this definition does not tell us of the common traits of comics, regardless of their target audience. Roger Sabin's definition (in *Adult Comics*²³⁵) provides a more solid starting point: 'a comic is a narrative in the form of a sequence of pictures.' Comics are usually published regularly in thin editions. Humour is not an essential requirement, even though the name suggests its presence.

Comics are supposedly self-evident and are not considered to be in the realm for experimenting with the meaning of words, and the significance of 'meaning'. They are considered to have their own conventions and practices, which differ significantly from those that apply to novels, short stories, poems or essays. They have typically been excluded from the noble realm of literature, inhabiting instead the despised (the dominant and more easily accessible) world of popular culture. They are considered to be a medium for entertainment and not education: unlike high literature it has no elevating powers. And for this have they been continually denigrated. Comics are considered a negative influence on a child's development, distracting them from worthwhile pursuits.²³⁶ The demonisation of comics allows them to enter the realm of the 'forbidden other.'

A comic is usually cheap and dispensable. Comics have not been considered valuable for historical or cultural research, which may provide insight into a particular society. Comics are considered to be for those who are too lazy to read 'real literature'. Comics are not normally 'critical' or 'sophisticated', because their market is usually at the 'juvenile and uncritical'.²³⁷ However, Sabin writes, that a new comic market has emerged since the mid-1980s. During this decade, comic writers have broadened their subject matter ranging from political satire, erotic fantasy to eyewitness accounts of the Holocaust.²³⁸ This 'new' type of comic which became more

²³⁴ Seno Gumira Ajidarma, *Jazz, Parfum dan Insiden*, Yogyakarta: Bentang, 1996, back cover.

²³⁵ Roger Sabin, *Adult Comics: An Introduction*, London: Routledge, 1993, p. 5.

²³⁶ Marcel Bonneff, *Komik Indonesia*, trans. Rahayu S. Hidayat, Jakarta: Kepustakaan Populer Gramedia, 1998. p. 3.

²³⁷ Sabin, 1993, p. 5.

²³⁸ Sabin, 1993, p.1. Another significant 'adult comic' is Joe Sacco's comic (published as a book), *Palestine*, Seattle, WA: Fantagraphics Books, 2001.

evident during the 1980s, was linked to previous styles of comics. Thus, Sabin argues that the contemporary 'adult' comic has a history that goes back to the 19th century.²³⁹

The narrative is formed by a sequence of panels and supporting text. Each panel blocks in a scene, highlighting it as an important part of the narrative. The reliance on visual or textual strength changes from comic to comic, as both features inform meaning. A comic is recognisable by its combination of text and graphics. A comic usually has four types of text. First, there is the narrative. The narrative is frequently placed at the top of the panel, often describing the scene's context. Second, there is the speech of the characters, which is placed in 'speech balloons', originating from the character's mouth. Third, there are the words that are used to express sound or action. These words are often onomatopoeic and include, 'ker-splat' and 'pow'. These words may be written in large, bold letters to indicate their loudness. Fourth, and less frequently, than the speech balloons, there are the 'thought balloons'. The thought balloons are noticeable by the small circles which arise from the character's forehead. Comics also use 'speed lines' to indicate the velocity of a vehicle, and the artists may draw characters with bulging eyes to emphasise a sense of surprise. These devices are not the only features of comics, but are ones that appear frequently in comics.

Traditionally, comics tell formulaic stories with predictable conclusions and often have a limited and consistent set of characters, all with their own circumscribed traits. They have a limited range of behaviour, or in E.M. Forster's words, they are 'flat'. That is, they can be reduced down to one particular personality trait.²⁴⁰ They have a clear-cut and often 'stereotypical' or one-dimensional character. Characters are associated with certain specific sets of beliefs: each has their own clearly definable essence. Clichéd characters and their mass production position them as part of popular culture. Comics are associated with characters that lack complexity and that do not develop throughout the narrative. These characters are flat, but *with* a central identity. To position Seno's comics as postmodern must go beyond merely acknowledging the potential presence of 'serious content'. The serious content and other aspects of the comic must be related back to the general condition of postmodernity. I must indicate the particularly postmodernist aspects of Seno's comics, which are different from other modernist comics.

In Indonesia, Marcel Bonnef describes the presence of '*komik didaktis*' (didactic comics). That is, comics that were used as part of governmental propaganda efforts. These included short comics that reminded the populace of their obligation to vote in the 1971 general election, to participate in family planning programs and to encourage them to adhere more strictly to their

²³⁹ Sabin, 1993, p. 5.

²⁴⁰ E.M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel*, Middlesex: Penguin, 1927. p. 71.

religions. Bonnef writes that comics had two distinct roles: their first role was primarily to entertain, while secondly, (either directly or indirectly) to educate their readers. He concludes, by arguing,

'Comics can only develop in an artistic and intellectual perspective, when there has been research into them. Without that, comics will remain as a side-product, in between other forms of creation.'

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The hegemonic ideology was expressed in a form more easily accessible to larger sections of the society. The mass appeal of comics was recognised. These 'comics' do not usurp standard forms of communication, but are distinctly subordinate to them.

The Comic and Seno

Seno's comics are part of his effort to redress what he thinks to be the undignified position comics occupy in contemporary Indonesia.²⁴² The political relevance of the topics in the comics (including the rapes of Chinese women in 1998 and the pursuit of ill-gained wealth) reflects his interest in making them a legitimate part of current social discourse. The works also reflect his interest in the works of Karl May²⁴³ and Kosasih. Seno has cited these two writers as being significant influences on his interest in literature: Karl May as a writer of adventure stories, and Kosasih as a comic artist.²⁴⁴ These writers have a direct connection to popular literature. Some of Seno's works share similarities with comics, despite appearing in a 'high literature' form. This is evident through his interest in detective stories, violence and love interests, where he incorporates a swashbuckling mix of crime, sex and violence (re: *Matinya Seorang Penari Telanjang*).²⁴⁵ The comics are determinedly political works. They have a clear aim to disturb established cultural conventions.

Kematian Donny Osmond is the second of three comics written by Seno. Unlike *Jakarta 2039* and *Misteri Harta Centini*, few of its stories have any direct social or political relevance. In this sense, it resembles the typical role of comics as a medium for entertainment. But, the way it 'entertains' and the way it breaks standard comic practices provides another example of Seno's engagement with postmodern issues.

KDO neither fully follows a comic form nor that of a standard literary text. The text of the 14 short stories, is interspersed with sections of the text reproduced in comic style. These sections share

²⁴¹ Marcel Bonnef, *Komik Indonesia*, trans. by Rahayu S. Hidayat, Jakarta: Keperpustakaan Popular Gramedia, 1998. p. 66

²⁴² See Ajidarma's Ph.D. proposal, *Tiga Panji Tengkorak: Ideologi di balik teks*. (unpublished).

²⁴³ See Ajidarma's article on Karl May, "'Sandhya Kala Ning Apacahe?" in *Kompas*, February 23, 1992.

²⁴⁴ Interview with Seno Gumira Ajidarma, Citra Office, Kebayoran Baru, June 4, 2003.

²⁴⁵ Ajidarma, 2000.

the features mentioned earlier: panels with drawings inside and the various types of text (descriptive, speech balloons, thought balloons). The comic sections are typical comics – it is only their presence amongst pages of pure text, that disrupt any possibilities of a coherent or uniform style within the book. *KDO* is an example of Seno's play with a text's visual elements. There is a disruption of textual form.

Aside from the intrusion of comics within the texts, other elements also impinge upon the purity of the text as a literary product of one author's imagination. *KDO* contains photographs of foreign celebrities, an Indonesian recipe for 'fish cakes' and the lyrics of a Deep Purple song. The presence of these texts prevent the expectation of a sole engagement with Seno's own *original* literary expression. Seno borrows other writers' words, but these appropriations augment the short stories in the text. Their presence suggests the incompleteness of the short story alone. The text is not an independent form separate from the ideas from which they derive. Seno shows the sources of the stories to the reader. Seno's incorporation of these elements is similar to his use of footnotes in his other works (such as *Jazz*, *Parfum dan Insiden* and *Misteri Harta Centini*). Like the footnotes, the lyrics and the recipe show the stories own interaction with the cultural phenomena that they refer to. In this sense, Seno's works are part of a broader cultural dialogue, they are not restricted to the realm of literature.

The postmodern adventures in *KDO* are generally limited to visual and graphic experimentation. There are few new developments in postmodernist intrusions upon the 'realist illusion' or sections which refer readers to the constructedness of the text. However, *KDO* is significant as it asserts Seno's vision of a literature free of modernist hierarchies: there is no separation between 'standard' literature and a comic. This text, like *Misteri Harta Centini* best exemplifies the idea of the postmodernist discordant combinations of form: any text, whether it be fictional or borrowed from another source can be appropriated into this work of Seno's.

In *KDO*, Seno's borrowings from popular culture are largely from Western sources. This incorporation of American or British icons of popular culture history, also contrasts with the New Order ideal of looking further into Indonesian traditions for inspiration. In this sense, Seno's engagement with popular culture subverts New Order ideologies at two levels: through the abandoning of cultural hierarchies and through accepting foreign sources as a legitimate means for renewing Indonesian literature.

Misteri Harta Centini (MHC) (The Mystery of the Centini Wealth) has only been published as a comic, unlike *Jakarta 2039* or the stories from *KDO*, which were all published as short stories prior to their publication as comics. This suggests an increasing commitment to his comics. *MHC*

is announced as the first in a series of comics, based on *Sukab, Intel Melayu* (Sukab, the Malay Spy). To enhance its status as a comic it states on the inside of the back cover that the next title in the Sukab series will be *Sukab vs. Ninja Burik*. As a comic, *MHC* relies equally on the drawings for its action and significance. In *MHC* Seno tackles a serious issue in a medium that has previously been considered a medium for entertainment. In this sense, *MHC* has more in common with *Jakarta 2039*: both works establish the comic medium as a form for social criticism. The experimentations with typography are not continued, but the conventional comic form continues its expression of postmodernism and social criticism in other ways.

Conclusions

An engagement with popular culture rejects the rigidity of high cultural forms. Through incorporating and exploring various aspects of the comic form, Seno has rejected the presumed mutual exclusivity of popular cultural forms from those of high literature. It is this ambiguity of form and style that has come to play more of a role in Seno's works, making his works amalgamations and distortions of established literary models. It is this act of showing their interconnectedness that Seno has broadened the scope of Indonesian postmodern literature.

The presence of a precedent in serious (or adult) comics does not deny the *postmodernness* of Seno's comics, just as previous cases 'flat' characters do not deny the postmodernness of contemporary characters in the fictions of Rushdie or de Lillo. Seno's comics make sense in the postmodern ethos. The condition of postmodernity makes such an expression viable; even powerful – it gives it the ability to affect change and re-determine the social and cultural order.

Unlike modernist incorporations of graphics, the visual element throughout various contemporary texts have moved from being passively there to being an active part of the literary experience, vying for interest and sense of import. Unlike the decidedly didactic comics of the New Order, Seno's comics such as *Jakarta 2039* and *Sukab Intel Melayu* reproduce subversive politics: they speak the language of the repressed in their style and form. Seno's comics do not come from the top down, 'colonising' 'popular culture' forms, but assume the different form from a more equal, empathetic position. Also, dissimilar to the case mentioned by Sabin, Seno clearly acknowledges the past comic artists who have played a significant role in influencing his own comics.

The postmodernness of Seno's comics does not only rely on their engagement with the narrative of ethnic minorities and with topical political issues (as does Joe Sacco's *Palestine*), but also on their characterisation. The shift in characterisation from *Jakarta 2039* to *Sukab Intel Melayu* is evidence of a development in Seno's engagement with the problematising of 'identity' and asserts the continuing relevance of postmodernist thought in contemporary Indonesia.

Chapter Four

Conclusion

This thesis has placed postmodernism as a central source of ideas for understanding the works of Seno Gumira Ajidarma's fiction. I have used numerous works to show examples of postmodern ideas. The dominant expressions of postmodernism are the micronarratives, characters with multiple selves, metafiction and an appropriation of popular culture.

Through representing micronarratives, Seno has challenged dominant New Order ideologies. These challenges remain pertinent to contemporary Indonesia in the post New Order era. He has given a voice to those who had been both silenced in political discourse and violently suppressed. Through the assertion of the rights of 'peripheral' communities, Seno has confronted the Jakarta-centric dominance of the modern Indonesian state. Through his telling of micronarratives, Seno has informed readers of suffering and human rights abuses. These micronarratives not only commented on the indistinct borders between non-fiction and fiction, but also enhanced the role of fiction as a socially engaged medium. By doing so, in these texts, Seno also took contemporary Indonesian fiction away from the surrealist writing which dominated the New Order era. The micronarrative fictions restored the position of his literature as being a 'harmful' and critical medium which provided an alternative vision to understanding contemporary Indonesia.

The characters in Seno's fictions have also been used to criticise New Order ideologies. Through using characters with multiple selves and with problematic essences, Seno has imbued his characters with a strong sense of personal independence. They have been able to break free of what has subordinated themselves to an unquestioned autocratic authority. Their independence has also been used to show up the conformist and severely restricted mode of being, which was propagated throughout the New Order period. His characters cut to the core of a dominant ideology which prioritised the rights of an abstract and general community, over the rights of individuals. Too often the suppression of individuals was violent and was justified by a morally base political elite. The characters who rebelled against materialism and ideological conformism were not educated and had no particular skills. Seno's vision of was particularly democratic: anyone, at any time – regardless of their history could oppose a despotic government. Change could come from within and there was no need to look for an inspiring leader. Seno's characters were powerful exemplars of the will needed to oppose New Order authoritarianism.

Through metafiction, Seno has provided insightful critiques on the way meaning is constructed. The critiques apply to fictional and non-fictional forms of writing. The pointed criticisms of the author's manipulations and the limitations of the literary form, refer readers to the subjectivity of any attempt at asserting a universal truth. Seno's metafiction negates the attempts of the New Order to define and explore Indonesian history from their ideologically biased position. Seno's metafiction which are often combined with historical events, do not claim objectivity, but instead show how representations of the violence suffered by others is inherently problematic. The metafictional practices show readers the constructedness of texts and their connection to particular ideologies. These practices attack the New Order's attempts to enforce a limited interpretation on Indonesia's political history. Metafiction is against censorship and against the representation of others. It teaches readers how the process of 'othering' blurs attempts at discovering a reality, a truth.

Finally, Seno's use of popular culture is multi-layered. Engaging with popular culture confronts the hierarchies applied to modern literature. Through using comics as a medium for addressing social and political issues, Seno has questioned the idea of comics as a medium limited to entertainment. Comics are not merely a side product of the cultural and political condition, they can help shape and inform public discourse. Comics are not necessarily a 'safe' medium: they are a medium for confronting political and social issues. Seno's use of slang on the back covers of his works, or as indications of the oral base of the text, also criticises the use of language throughout the New Order. The staid and indirect speech which characterised New Order officials (and in particular Suharto) has been replaced by a language that does not confer immediate superiority upon others. The language of Seno's characters is spontaneous and disregards the cultural practices of an aristocratic Javanese tradition, which appeared complicit in the acceptance of an authoritarian and repressive government.

This thesis has found that postmodern literary practices are found throughout many of Seno's works. They have been used as a means of opposing many of the ideologies of the New Order government. The postmodern ideas of a plurality of truths and the limitations of representation have been central to Seno's confrontation to the singular and restricted understanding given to Indonesian culture, society and history throughout the New Order. Far from being indifferent to political change, postmodernism in this instance has been specifically used as a tool for political and social subversion.

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Appendix: Books by Seno Gumira Ajidarma

Title	English Title	City	Publisher	Year	Form
Mati Mati Mati	Dead Dead Dead	Not available	Not available	1975	Poetry
Bayi Mati	Dead Baby	Jakarta	Kesembilan Belas Puisi Indonesia	1978	Poetry
Catatan-catatan Mira Sato	The Notes of Mira Sato	Jakarta	Puisi Indonesia	1978	Poetry
Manusia Kamar	Room Person	Jakarta	Haji Masagung	1988	Short story collection
Penembak Misterius	The Mysterious Sniper	Jakarta	Pustaka Utama Grafiti	1993	Short story collection
Saksi Mata	Eyewitness	Yogyakarta	Yayasan Benteng Budaya	2002	Short story collection
Dilarang Menyanyi di Kamar Mandi	Singing in the Bathroom is Forbidden	Not available	Not available	Not available	Short story collection
Negeri Kabut	The Land of Fog	Jakarta	Gramedia Widiasarana	1996	Short story collection
Sebuah Pertanyaan untuk Cinta	A Question for Love	Jakarta	Gramedia Pustaka Utama	2002	Short story collection
Jazz, Parfum dan Insiden	Jazz, Perfume and the Incident	Yogyakarta	Yayasan Benteng Budaya	1996	Novel
Ketika Jurnalisme dibungkam, Sastra harus bicara	When Journalism is Silenced, Literature Must Speak	Yogyakarta	Yayasan Benteng Budaya	1997	Collection of essays
Iblis Tidak Pernah Mati	The Devil Has Never Died	Yogyakarta	Galang Press	1999	Short story collection
Atas Nama Malam	In the Name of the Night	Jakarta	Gramedia Pustaka Utama	1999	Short story collection
Matinya Seorang Penari Telanjang	Death of an Exotic Dancer	Yogyakarta	Galang Press	2000	Revision of previous short story
Layar Kata	Screen Words	Yogyakarta	Yayasan Benteng Budaya	2000	Film criticism essays
Wisanggeni Sang Buronan	Wisanggeni, The Outlaw	Yogyakarta	Yayasan Benteng Budaya	2000	Novel
Jakarta 2039	Jakarta 2039	Yogyakarta	Galang Press	2001	Comic
Dunia Sukab	Sukab's World	Jakarta	Kompas	2001	Short story collection
Mengapa Kau Culik Anak Kami?	Why did you Kidnap our Child?	Yogyakarta	Galang Press	2001	Plays
Kematian Donny Osmond	The Death of Donny Osmond	Jakarta	Gramedia Pustaka Utama	2001	Short story collection
Surat dari Palmerah	Letters from Palmerah	Jakarta	Kepustakaan Populer Gramedia	2002	Collection of letters from the editor
Sepotong Senja untuk Pacarku	A Slice of Sunset for My Girlfriend	Jakarta	Gramedia Pustaka Utama	2002	Short story collection
Sukab Intel Melayu: Misteri Harta Centini	Sukab the Malay Spy: The Mystery of the Centini Wealth	Jakarta	Kepustakaan Populer Gramedia	2002	Comic
Aku Kesepian Sayang. 'Datanglah. Menjelang Kematian.'	I'm Lonely, Honey. 'Visit me close to death.'	Not available	Not available	Not available	Not available
Negeri Senja	The Land of Sunset	Jakarta	Kepustakaan Populer Gramedia	2003	Novel